

LESBIAN DYADS AS FAMILIES

By

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This is a study of lesbian couples who are in committed relationships. Its purpose is to explore some of the ways in which such couples display characteristics and problems typical of “nuclear families.” This will be done by examining the *process* of dyadic/familial relationships rather than the *function*. Dyads under examination are female same-sex couples who are in committed relationships. The women in this study insist that they have created families--a haven from which they gain a sense of “we-ness.”

Data for this study were gathered by the author from a snowball sample that yielded 168 participants (84 couples). The participants allowed me to delve into their personal relationships, gathering information regarding the Formation phase of their relationship and the Maintenance/Change phase of their relationships. Five specific topics are explored within these phases: dating, commitment, allocation of household tasks, financial resources and management, and domestic violence.

While not generalizable, findings indicate that the women in this sample move very quickly from the Formation phase to the Maintenance/Change phase of a sexually bonded

primary relationship. Once in the Maintenance/Change phase, perceptions of equity play a more important role than realities of equity regarding allocation of household tasks and financial resources and management. Domestic violence was found to exist in 25 percent of the sample, and the victims of partner violence display many of the characteristics of the heterosexual battered women. Among perpetrators of violence, issues of abuse of authority and abuse of trust were common.



## CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

We as a culture and society believe that to be coupled is the norm. One need only to look to the media and the popular press to see how fully imbedded this social fact is within our culture and society. Television talk show hosts such as Montel Williams, Ricki Lake, Oprah Winfrey, and Jerry Springer are in huge demand based largely on their shows dealing with interactions between partners in a dyad. Magazines such as *Cosmopolitan*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Redbook*, and *Seventeen* regularly feature stories about finding the right partner, forming a relationship, and maintaining it over time. Indeed, Pepper Schwartz, a noted sociologist, authors a monthly article in *Glamour* that is devoted entirely to discussions regarding dyadic relationships. These television shows and magazine articles have an overarching consistency in that “couple” is defined as a heterosexual male and a heterosexual female who are moving toward legal marriage and procreation.

Sociological journals such as *Journal of Family Issues*, *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, and the *American Sociological Review* are replete with articles dealing with research on structural and individual variable effects on dyads. Sociologists have examined the effects of gender, women’s work, stress, chemical dependency, education, and myriad other variables on dyadic/familial relationships.

Even though the mainstream articles and the scholarly articles have completely different formats and audiences, there is a glaring similarity. Researchers whose work

appears in academic sociological venues typically adhere to the same definition of a dyad: a heterosexual female and who are legally married, and who have or will procreate. Concurrently, many of these same researchers place strict boundaries on the term “family.” “Family” is defined as an intergenerational unit consisting of the dyad and its progeny (Malinowski, 1930; Parsons, 1965; Pitts, 1964; Popenoe, 1993; Radcliff-Brown, 1952).

In essence, then, the legally married heterosexual dyad is seen as the basic unit of the concept of “family.” Within this line of thought, marriage is essentially a license to procreate. The premise that the “family” must be intergenerational clearly indicates that children make the difference in determining what is a “family” and what is not. The imprimatur of validity as a “family” is given only when legal marriage and parenthood are inseparable.

But what of those couples who do not fit within the strict boundaries of “family?” As our society has evolved from agrarian to industrial to post-industrial, so too has the concept of “family” evolved (Goode, 1964; Mahoney, 1986; Scanzoni, 1995), but sociological thought has not kept pace. Indeed, while the nuclear or benchmark family is now the minority (Rubin, 1995), this model is still the standard to which all other family forms are compared. In the post-industrial society, individuals are re-creating and re-inventing dyadic/familial forms in order to make their lives better (Scanzoni, 1995). Included in these re-inventions are dyads/families whose members eschew marriage and procreation due to ideological considerations, biological considerations, and legal considerations. These re-inventions are referred to as “alternative lifestyles” rather than as families by social scientists (Boswell, 1994; Scanzoni et al., 1989). The dilemma is that the delineation of “alternative lifestyle” from “family” implies that “alternative lifestyles”

are somehow less than or not equal to “family” (Scanzoni et al., 1989). By definition, this constructed dichotomy sets up social scientists as the moral arbiters of good versus less than good family forms (Scanzoni et al., 1989)

This is a study of 84 lesbian couples (168 individuals) who are in committed relationships. Its purpose is to explore some of the ways in which such couples display characteristics and problems typical of the nuclear family form. In order to effect this goal, several issues must be addressed. First and foremost, a higher order theoretical construct must be found. That is, the term “family” must be seen for what it is--a lay term that is laden with moral and emotional implications (Scanzoni et al., 1989). Second, the *process* of relationships must be examined in lieu of the *function*. Finally, the focus on characteristics of the actors in a relationship must be diminished--the *relationship* is key, not the actors in a relationship. Optimally, by moving to a higher order theoretical construct and by concentrating on the process of the relationship rather than the function, researchers can examine such forms of “alternative lifestyles” under family studies as valid family forms within their own right.

## CHAPTER TWO CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

### Introduction

Family forms built around homosexual dyads have existed for centuries (Boswell, 1994). Yet, to the present, the status of such couples as “families” has been denied. Instead, families that have a same-sex dyad at the center have been labeled “Other” or “Alternative” (Boswell, 1994; Faderman, 1991; Weston, 1991). This fact has not been lost on the participants in this study. Over and over, I heard the phrase, “We are no different, our families are just like yours.” The women who participated in this project seemed intent upon impressing me with the fact that they form dyads/families in the same fashion and for the same reasons that heterosexuals do. Their concerns and worries echoed the universal themes voiced by their heterosexual, nuclear family counterparts: concern for their loved ones, worries about paying the mortgage, saving money for their children’s education, planning for retirement, and the like. With the exception of the gender of their object of desire, the dyads/families created and maintained by the participants were virtually identical to any benchmark family model. Yet, they recognize that their families are seen as “different,” and thus not equivalent.

While same-sex unions have been tolerated by society in the past (Boswell, 1994; Faderman, 1991; Kennedy and Davis, 1993; Miller, 1995), acceptance as a type of family was, and remains, unavailable to these unions. Much of the blame for this lack of

acceptance as a family form lies with the barrier that is constructed by language, both as a cultural phenomenon and as an academic phenomenon.

Boswell (1994) examines the language issue in relation to members of same-sex unions. His research suggests that the terms "husband" and "wife" have historically been synonyms for "man" and "woman," thereby excluding same sex unions from using the terms that are culturally recognized as the cornerstone of "the family." Further, he examines the use of the word "lover," which is the word most commonly used to define partners in a same sex union:

Probably the most common word in contemporary English is "lover," but is quite misleading because it is also frequently applied to relationships of the majority, which are entirely different, and contaminate the word's use in relation to homosexual couplings. A heterosexual "lover" is generally *not* the equivalent of a spouse: it is either someone to whom a heterosexual is *not* married . . . or a love interest in *addition* to a spouse. . . . These associations are not apposite to "lover" as applied to same-sex couples, for whom the word almost always designates the primary and exclusive focus of erotic life, usually intended to remain so permanently. Using "lover" for same-sex partners implicitly suggests that *all* same-sex unions are illicit relationships, comparable to what passes between a heterosexual married male and his mistress rather than to the man's union with his wife. (p. 16)

Informed by the significance of language in the granting of equivalence to "family," this chapter examines historical and theoretical dimensions of the status of same-sex unions. The time frame has been limited to mid-nineteenth century through the present. Further, since this is a study of female same-sex dyads, the bulk of the material presented here is limited to homosexual dyads/families created by women.

### "Female Friendships" in Nineteenth Century America

In her book *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, Faderman (1991) recounts an essay that was written by William Cullen Bryant in 1843 for the *Saturday Evening Post*. In this

essay, Bryant describes a “female friendship” of two women whom he had met while on a trip to Vermont. The essay was written not as sensational journalism, but rather was written in a respectful and flattering tone, as the following excerpt shows:

In their youthful days, they took each other as companions for life, and this union, no less sacred to them than the tie of marriage, has subsisted in uninterrupted harmony, for 40 years, during which they have shared each others' occupations and pleasures and works of charity while in health, and watched over each other tenderly in sickness. . . they slept on the same pillow and had a common purse, and adopted each others relations. (Faderman, 1991, p. 1)

Bryant's essay was but one example of a number of articles that were written regaling the many “female friendships” of the time (Faderman, 1991; Miller, 1995). The similarities between the articles cannot go unnoticed. The nature of the relationships appear to be no different than any loving and committed relationship between married heterosexual partners. However, the legal status of “married” was conspicuously denied to these female same-sex unions. Instead, the relationships were deemed “friendships.”

The latter part of the nineteenth-century saw the term “female friendships” joined by descriptions such as “Boston marriages” and “romantic friendships” (Faderman, 1991). “Boston marriages” and “romantic friendships” referred to specific female same-sex dyads: those whose partners were members of a newly created group--college educated, professional women who chose to form committed relationships and set up households with other college educated, professional women.<sup>1</sup> Faderman (1991) makes the point that while it cannot be definitively proven that these Boston marriages had a sexual

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<sup>1</sup>This is not to suggest that women who were not college educated did not enter into female same-sex relationships--they did. Faderman simply shows that there was a distinction made between those dyads whose members were college educated and those who were not.

component, what is known is that the relationships were based on love and commitment. Thus, love and commitment were the boundaries within which these pairings existed. However, a clear distinction was made between legal marriage and “Boston marriage” or “romantic friendship.”

It is important to note the semantic distinction that was made between female same-sex dyads (i.e., “friendships,” “Boston marriage”) and the term marriage which, as a component of “family,” was available only to heterosexual dyads. Thus, while “female friendships” and “Boston marriages” were accepted (within limits) by nineteenth century society as some form of dyadic coupling, the language used to describe them clearly distinguished them from “family.”

After the turn of the century, however, even this limited form of acceptance vanished. Perhaps the backlash was aimed at women, in general, due to increasing numbers of women entering institutions of higher education and the professional workplace. This movement gave women economic freedom and upset the status quo (Faludi, 1991). Whatever the reason, psychiatrists began labeling lesbian couples in much more negative ways.

German psychiatrist Karl Westphal was the first to suggest that love between two women was a result of sexual inversion (i.e., a man trapped in a woman’s body)(Faderman, 1991). Sexual inversion was seen as a congenital defect. Labeling homosexual orientation as a defect paved the way for large scale acceptance of lesbianism as something “wrong.” It is not a great leap to then conceptualize female same-sex pairings as “wrong.”

Havelock Ellis (1913 and 1936 trans.), however, developed this view of inversion more fully. As he saw it, sexual inversion was both a congenital defect and a hereditary trait. Further, inversion could be either active or dormant. Those women who were actively inverted were to become the model for the stereotypical “butch” of the twentieth century:

The brusque, energetic movements, the attitude of the arms, the direct speech, the inflections of the voice, the masculine straightforwardness and sense of honor . . . will often suggest the underlying psychic abnormality to a keen observer. In the habits not only is there frequently a pronounced taste for smoking cigarettes, often found in quite feminine women, but also a decided taste and tolerance for cigars. There is also a dislike and sometimes incapacity for needlework and other domestic occupations, while there is often some capacity for athletics. (p. 250)

Ellis argued that sexual inversion among females could lie dormant forever, but cautioned that the dormant inversion could be awakened by special circumstances--the active invert ensnared partners by awakening the latent inversion of “feminine” heterosexual women. Ellis warned that both true inverts and latent inverts who had awakened should not be allowed to have children since this deviant trait was hereditary. Although Ellis collected case studies on lesbian women and their relationships with other women, no effort was made to understand the process of dyadic and familial formation. Instead, his research plan was designed with three basic questions: (1) How did the deviant behavior occur? (2) What were the physical characteristics of a “true lesbian”? and (3) What was the nature of the sexual activity between two women?

Ellis also connected sexual inversion with feminism, suggesting that the combination of the two led women to eschew marriage and embrace independence (defined, in part, as forming female same-sex dyads). Thus, the gulf between “female



friendships” and “real” marriages/families was widening. As female same-sex dyads/families were seen as attacks against marriages/families, it is no wonder that any hope for validity for lesbian dyads/families grew dim.

Once the European sexologists’ literature was disseminated in the United States, the attacks against lesbian dyads/families began in earnest. The relationships were described as abnormal and degenerate and the partners in these relationships were described as “unsightly and abnormal beings” (Faderman, 1991). American physicians felt compelled to warn the public about the threat of female pairings:

Bernard Talmey, for example, in his 1904 treatise *Woman*, insisted that homosexuality in females had never been made a legal offense only because of “the ignorance of the law making power of the existence of this anomaly. The layman generally does not even surmise its existence.” Because of such ignorance, he concluded, women’s intimate attachments with each other are considered often erroneously as “mere friendship.” (Faderman, 1991, p. 50)

Thus, within the space of about seventy years, female same-sex dyads moved from a public perception of “female friendships” to “degenerate” pairings to illegal pairings. In this context, sociological study of the family developed--mostly under the aegis of functionalism.

#### Functionalism and the “Family”

Malinowski, one of the founding fathers of functionalism, became profoundly interested in the existence, functions, and roles of the nuclear family as a result of the influence of Westermarck. Building on Westermarck’s “position on the universality of the nuclear family” (Harris, 1968), as well as “the brilliant suggestions of Durkheim . . .,” Malinowski (1913, 1927, 1930, 1939, 1962) grappled with first, defining “family” in the context of its relationship with the social structure, and second, with discovering the

functions of the family as they relate to the larger social structure. He saw the family as “the domestic institution *par excellence*.” He argued

It may be safely laid down that the family, based on marriage, is the only domestic institution of mankind, that is, the only institution the function of which is the procreation, the early cares, and the elementary training of the offspring. (p. 26)

Implicit in Malinowski’s definition of “family” is a legally married heterosexual dyad whose functions are procreation and socialization of progeny. The functions with which Malinowski endowed the family ignored individual needs of family members but instead looked at the structural needs of society--reproduction and maintenance of the status quo. Both of these structural needs could be met through the procreation and socialization functions of the nuclear family. Malinowski’s definition of “family” also left no room for individual re-inventions of the concept of family. Instead, stringent parameters or boundaries were placed on the legitimacy of family form. Legal marriage and procreation became indistinguishable; marriage was a license to procreate.<sup>2</sup> And, by definition, only heterosexuals were allowed to become members of this exclusive club:

The Principle of Legitimacy . . . declares that, in all human societies, a father is regarded by law, custom and morals as an indispensable element of the procreative group. The woman has to be married before she is allowed legitimately to conceive, or else a subsequent marriage or an act of adoption gives the child full tribal or civil status. Otherwise, the child of the unmarried mother is definitely stigmatized by an inferior and anomalous position in society. (Malinowski, 1930, p. 23)

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<sup>2</sup>It should be noted that while lesbian partners cannot biologically procreate, they can parent. Many lesbian couples raise children who were brought into the relationship from prior heterosexual relationships, adoptions, artificial insemination, and pairings with men with the explicit purpose of conception.

G. P. Murdock was another anthropologist who took a functionalist approach to his studies of families and kinship systems. In *Social Structure*, Murdock (1949) first defines the broad concept of “family”:

The family is a social group characterized by common residence, economic cooperation, and reproduction. It includes adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children, own or adopted, of the sexually cohabiting adults. (p. 1)

Murdock then goes on to define “nuclear family” as a subset of “family,” although upon inspection, the difference does not appear to be significant:

The first and most basic, called herewith the *nuclear family*, consists typically of a married man and woman with their offspring, although in individual cases one or more additional persons may reside with them . . . The nuclear family is a universal human social grouping . . . the nuclear family is always recognizable and always has its distinctive and vital functions--sexual, economic, reproductive, and educational. (p. 1)

Murdock’s conceptualization of “family” is quite similar to Malinowski’s.

Murdock, however, endowed his concept of family with additional functions: besides procreation and socialization of children, the functions of economic interdependence and sexual regulation are included. The economic interdependence of which Murdock speaks refers to the division of labor within the family unit, echoing the influence of Durkheim. In Murdock’s framework, the husband (male) is the breadwinner or hunter while the wife (female) is the nurturer and gatherer. This unique division of labor is complementary and is proper within the context of the larger social structure, per the functionalist paradigm. The sexual regulation function in Murdock’s families suggests that the family is the conduit by which incest taboos, pre-marital sexual activity taboos, and extra-marital sexual activity taboos, among others, are learned.

Once again, the “family” is a strictly bounded concept that exists only for the good of the societal organism. The functions and activities which are performed by the “family” are driven and directed by the reified social organism known as society. There is no room in Murdock’s conceptual framework of family forms that are created or invented by individuals to satisfy needs other than society’s.

But perhaps the quintessential functionalist who still today drives much of the sociological research and literature on the “family” is Talcott Parsons (Glenn, 1993; Kingsbury and Scanlon, 1992; Popenoe, 1993). Parsons (1943) was concerned with what he saw as a troubling aspect of sociological studies on families: he saw too much emphasis placed on “problems of individual adjustment” (p. 177) and not enough emphasis placed on the “comparative structural perspective” (p. 177). In Parson’s perspective, institutions such as “the family” exist for the greater good of the social organism--to assist society in maintaining equilibrium. Social institutions are endowed with specific functions, and the purpose of these functions is to maintain the status quo. The individuals within the institutions “accept their common belongingness as members of a collective system and . . . trust each other to fulfill mutual expectations attached to membership in their respective roles” (Parsons, 1965, p. 38).

The “conjugal family” defined by Parsons (1943) as a married heterosexual dyad with progeny is described as “the normal ‘household’ unit” (p. 183). The functions of the “conjugal family” in Parson’s framework include procreation, socialization of children, sexual regulation, and economic interdependence (Parsons, 1937; Parsons, 1943; Parsons and Bales, 1955). In order to properly execute these functions, Parson’s “family” is highly differentiated with regard to gender roles. The strict boundaries of the definition of

“family,” the specific roles assigned to each member of the “family,” and the specific functions with which the “family” is endowed are essential in Parson’s functionalist framework. Conformity to norms is the over-arching message that we receive from Parsons and norms exist for the express purpose of maintaining equilibrium (i.e., status quo) for society. There is an overwhelming sense of altruism at the heart of the Parson’s functionalism, (i.e., everything is done for the greater good of a reified society) which is not surprising given both his religious upbringing and his devotion to Durkheimian thought. There is little sense of human agency in Parson’s work. That is, individuals within society perform their functions by rote, according to a set of prescribed rules that are dictated by “Society.” Only those groups who conform to the strict definitions and parameters defined by Parsonian functionalism can be defined as “family.” The implicit message is that nonconformists act without regard to the greater good.

Thus, while the early sociologists and anthropologists used more neutral terminology than the psychiatrists, their narrow definition of “family” clearly meant that lesbian couples were excluded. After all, they could not procreate and, by extension, could not be in a position to socialize progeny--and these were the major functions of “the family” under functionalist thought. Differentiation of gender roles was impossible in “female friendships,” thus the economic interdependence function was nonexistent in such dyads. Clearly, the function of sexual regulation could not be trusted with female same-sex dyads inasmuch as any sexual activity performed by partners in a lesbian dyad was “degenerate” or illegal (Faderman, 1991; Miller, 1995). Could there be any way to counter the barrier that had been erected so that “female friendships” could be subsumed in some way under the concept of families?

### Rethinking the Concept of "Family"

Recognizing that the traditional, patriarchal concept of "couple" (i.e., a heterosexual woman and a heterosexual man who will legally marry or who are legally married) as the basic unit of "family" did not begin to encompass issues that were of grave import to women and to the concept of post-industrial families, Gravenhorst (1988) tried to redefine and recreate the concept of family by using a feminist paradigm. She described families as "erotic friendships," a term that conjoins the restricted exchange of sexual monogamy with the emotional sense of belonging that is at the core of dyadic relationships. The term "erotic friendship" is meant to elicit the sense that two individuals are committed to each other on both a sexual and an emotional level. This does not necessarily imply that they are sexually active, but rather that any sexual activity is generally limited to each other. Rather, the boundaries that Gravenhorst places on these "erotic friendships" are at a more metaphysical level: intimacy and commitment to each other and to the partnership is at the core of her theoretical framework. "Erotic friendship" has the added benefit of being an inclusive term--one that could easily describe a heterosexual man and woman who are legally married, a heterosexual cohabiting couple, or a same-sex couple. In her study of the erotic friendship of Hans and Helga, Gravenhorst looks at the *process* of the relationship rather than its function for society. Thus, not only does this paradigm transform the meaning of "family," but it transforms the way we research and study families. Rather than search for the function of the dyad as it relates to a larger structural level, Gravenhorst looks at the relationship itself as an important area of study. The focus of her research includes the nuances of the creation of

the relationship, the moves and transformations that the relationship takes, and the ultimate break-up of the relationship

While much of Gravenhorst's (1988) schema is suitable for the study of female same-sex couples, I had to discount it as a viable framework for this study. Specifically, the issue of language must be addressed. Gravenhorst's (1998) term "erotic friendship," while theoretically plausible, is a term that could be misunderstood within the context of female same-sex couples. Typically, as the literature review in Chapter Three will show, research on lesbian dyads has been limited to only one facet of their relationships--sexual activity. The term "erotic" can be construed as an emotionally charged and value laden word and might overshadow the goal of this dissertation which is to examine female same-sex dyads as family forms rather than as strongholds of titillating, deviant sexual activity.

Grappling with this issue led me to *The Sexual Bond: Rethinking Families and Close Relationships*. Scanzoni et al (1989) wrestled with the same theoretical and language problems. Unlike other sociologists, however, they emerged from their quest with the argument that "what are known as *alternative lifestyles* . . . are not of lesser significance nor are they Qualitatively Other from what is commonly known as the *benchmark* conventional nuclear family" (p. 9). They suggested the need for a higher level theoretical construct that would include the nuclear/benchmark family as a subset of the many forms of families in the post-industrial era. Borrowing liberally from past theoretical frameworks, Scanzoni et al. (1989) reconfigured existing sociological paradigms in an attempt to rethink the study of families, taking into consideration "the tension between human agency versus structural constraints and the consequences of that tension for changes in contemporary families and relationships" (p. 9). It must be noted that not all

components of the theory put forth by Scanzoni et al. (1989) will be used in this study, particularly the suggested methodology. Rather, the work is used as a sensitizing scheme. Scanzoni et al. (1989) as a Conceptual Schema

One of the first arguments used by the authors is that sociologists whose primary specializations are family studies have not followed the scientific dogma of objectivity. They make the point that other sociological specializations make use of broad constructs in their research such that value laden terms are not employed in conceptual frameworks. For instance, “sociologists who study formal organization use that broad construct to subsume varieties of ways persons organize bureaucracies. Researchers take for granted that no one way is necessarily better or worse than any other--there is no benchmark bureaucracy” (p. 35).

However, within the realm of family studies, the term “family” itself is fraught with emotional and value laden baggage. By defining the term “family” as the nuclear/benchmark model, which is the minority in the United States (Rubin, 1995), any other form of “family” is automatically relegated to *alternative* status.

Scanzoni et al. (1989) call for a higher level construct that will not only take into account “shifting empirical realities” (p. 36) but also strip family theorizing of its moral imperative. Looking to the discipline of psychology, the authors found a growing body of work pertaining to adult relationships that are contextualized under the rubric of “close relationships.” In an attempt to disassociate sociology from psychology, the authors suggest a reconsideration of Cooley’s (1909) notion of *primary* relationships:

The construct of primary relationship captures the essence of what is meant by CR [close relationships] but embeds it in long-standing sociological traditions in the same way that “close, personal, interpersonal, intimate”



are embedded in psychology. Hence, the term primary relation facilitates the generation and contribution of sociological insights. (p. 44)

The concept of primary relationships as espoused by Cooley (1909) consists of face-to-face interaction with mutual interdependence. Cooley (1909) also recognized that primary relationships both influence and are influenced by their context/environment. The family, the neighborhood, and the play group were the three major primary groups in Cooley's (1909) schema. Perhaps the most important concept contained within the parameters of primary group is the very component that defines it as *primary*, and that is a feeling of "we-ness." Cooley (1909) argued that the very essence of a primary group "is a 'we'; it involves the sort of . . . mutual identification for which 'we' is the natural expression" (p. 23). Faris (1937/1957), building upon the concept of primary group, argued that members of a primary group receive a sense of identity and belonging from the group. The pronouns "I," "you," and "them" are replaced with "us" and "we" as a result of membership in a primary group.

Primary relationships, per se, can subsume many types of relationships as recognized by Cooley (1909) and Scanzoni et al. (1989). For the purpose of this study, however, it is necessary to focus on a specific type of primary relationship--that of the female same-sex dyad. This type of relationship falls under what Scanzoni et al. (1989) refer to as "romantic relations, fiancée, spouse/lover relations" (p. 46) and is characterized by "sexual interdependence" (p. 47). Ultimately, the authors argue that

if the persons define sexual exchanges or interdependence as a *legitimate* element/expectation for their type of relationship (whether or not they are currently engaging in sexual activity), then they may be said to be in a sexually based primary relationship (sexually based primary relationship). (p. 47)

It should be noted that the “sexually based” part of this theoretical construct need not necessarily imply sexual activity. Rather, it implies a boundary--there is a commitment between the partners that theirs is a close, loving relationship that is distinct from, say, a friendship. Sexual rules and boundaries have been established (e.g., monogamy) between the partners in a sexually based primary relationship. Further, there is a commitment between the partners to make this relationship work for the long term.

The concept of the sexually based primary relationship reflects the authors' search for a higher level construct to replace the lower level theoretical constructs of “marriage” and “alternative lifestyles” and “family.”<sup>3</sup> The concept of sexually based primary relationship is inclusive, as opposed to the exclusive concepts typically used by family theoreticians and researchers. That is, the use of the sexually based primary relationship within the realm of family sociology negates the value judgments and emotionally laden, moralistic terminology of “nuclear family,” “benchmark family,” and even “family.” Instead, a theoretical construct is used that encompasses not only the “nuclear family,” but “alternative lifestyles”: the necessity of legal marriage contracts, rigid moral norms that dictate the boundaries and type of sexual activity, strict functions of “the family,” and cultural and racial/ethnic differences are rendered moot with the use of the concept of the sexually bonded primary relationship.

#### Theoretical Dimensions of Sexually Based Primary Relationships

Process. The theoretical dimensions of the sexually based primary relationship as examined by Scanzoni et al. (1989) have the following characteristics. First, the authors

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<sup>3</sup>It must be noted that Scanzoni has now adopted the construct of erotic friendship in lieu of the sexually based primary relationship. For reasons that are explained later in this chapter, I have chosen to use the sexually based primary relationship construct.

argue for a more process oriented model of the study of primary relationships: "The essence of that model . . . is that dynamics/change and development are more significant both in terms of theory and practice than are structure and patterns and stability" (p. 53). Study of "the family" has fallen victim to the seduction of using only one theoretical model of "family." While this eases the burden of the family theoretician, the sole model approach fails to take into consideration the evolution of social currents, trends, contexts, and situations. A model that may have once worked (albeit only for white middle class Americans) is still held to be the arbiter of "normal."

Human agency. In addition, Scanlon et al. (1989) recognize the need for a new family theory that encompass the assertion of human agency, vis-à-vis Alexander (1988). Previous family theories have delineated hegemonic concepts of family based on a model wherein the action is from the top down--that is, society determines what is and what is not a family, as well as the actions of members of the family. There is a pressing need in the post-industrial society to embrace a model that encompasses both a top-down model as well as a bottom to top model. For example, within the functionalist paradigm, the social structure denies access to family status to female same-sex dyads. A prime example of this is the recent furor over same-sex marriages. Policies and laws have been rushed through legislative bodies to prevent state reciprocity of recognition and legitimacy of same-sex marriages (e.g., The Defense of Marriage Act). Responses from lesbian women (and gay men), however, have included both structural and human agency processes. In essence, the social structure has forced the creation of alternate forms of "family: by denying access to family status. As a result, lesbian women have been put in the unique position of having to deconstruct the hegemonic standard of family and to re-

invent and re-create a model that (a) meets their own individual needs and (b) is socially acceptable. Note that the “socially acceptable” aspect may at this time be defined as acceptable within lesbian society. nonetheless, there is the need to have the relationship accepted as “family” on some plane, and human agency has been asserted in order to find this recognition. These processes clearly support the argument of Scanzoni et al. (1989) wherein they state

from the perspective of a dynamic systems theory *persons create institutions*, the process of creation becomes ultimately more significant than its product, although by no means are products unimportant. As Simmel suggests, any emergent product stands in “perpetual tension,” with forces around it leading persons to alter the product accordingly. (p. 53)

Reconfiguring social roles. Scanzoni et al. (1989) argue that Turner’s (1985) conception of roles within a relationship is more useful than those embraced by previous meta-theories. That is, roles should be perceived as working roles rather than fixed, static expectations. Although Scanzoni et al. (1989) essentially use the concept of negotiated social roles as a forum for gender roles, this argument can be reconfigured in the case of lesbian dyads. As there is the absence of a gender dichotomy within female same-sex pairings, roles based upon gender are virtually nonexistent (contrary to popular belief). However, there are other variables that would account for negotiation of roles within lesbian dyads--variables such as income, education, and age. The impact of these variables on role negotiation will be considered later in this text.

Primary relationships as processes. The final part of the theory put forth by Scanzoni et al. (1989) that will be used in this study is what they call the “process approach” (p. 59). The authors argue that primary relationships may go through up to four phases: formation, maintenance, change, and dissolution. They are careful, however,

to maintain that these phases are not necessarily linear, and that all relationships do not go through all of the separate phases. Further, there is the distinct possibility of a blurring of lines among certain phases. Most importantly, however, the phases of the relationship are heavily influenced by the human agency of the partners: “to a large degree the situation’s development is influenced by the pivotal character of the joint decision-making dynamics underlying the actors’ shared activities, interests, and so forth” (p. 59).

### Discussion

The term “sexually based primary relationship” suggested by Scanzoni et al. (1989) speaks to a very important sociological issue with regard to lesbian dyads. As previously discussed, the primary relationship is based on Cooley’s (1909) concept of primary group. The essence of the primary group is the feeling of “we-ness.” This concept of “we-ness” speaks to the very heart of research on lesbian women in general and lesbian dyads specifically. Due to their sexual orientation, lesbian women are in the unique position of being perceived as Other--by not only biological and affinal kin, but by society at large as well. Due to this “Other” or “Alternative” label, they are generally excluded from the normal avenues of “we-ness” which heterosexual individuals take for granted. Therefore, their search for “we-ness” takes on another dimension. Their search for “we-ness” forces them to re-create and re-invent not only dyadic/familial relationships, but to re-invent and re-create a whole other community (Weston, 1991). In recognition of the fact that their re-creations of dyads/families receive no acceptance of family status from society as a whole, they are forced to re-create and re-invent a concept of family that will at least be accepted by their own community. Thus, lesbian women are seeking a sense of belonging, a sense of validation, a sense of “we-ness” through not only their re-inventions of

dyads/families but through their re-inventions of “society” as well. Thus, I argue that the concept of the sexually based primary relationship is sociologically most appropriate for this study.

Clearly, the theoretical schema constructed by Scanzoni et al. (1989) allows research on lesbian dyads/families to be grounded within the domain of family studies. By constructing a higher level concept (sexually based primary relationship), this framework allows so-called alternative lifestyles a status equivalent to “family.” This framework assumes that no form of “family” that is better than another.

Further, this framework allows lesbian dyads/families to be studied as what they are: relationships within which the individuals seek a sense of “we-ness.” These are fluid relationships in which sexual activity is only a small part. Lesbian dyads/families certainly have the same recognizable phases that heterosexual dyads/families have: formation, maintenance, change, and dissolution. And, just as in heterosexual pairings, these phases are intrinsically dependent on the negotiating and acting of the individuals involved in the relationships. In their quest for “we-ness,” lesbian women are attracted to each other, form dyads, make commitments, raise children, negotiate roles, argue, and sometimes break up only to begin forming new relationships.

For the reasons delineated, it is clear that the conceptual framework presented by Scanzoni et al. (1989) provides the best starting point for this study. While not a perfect fit, it does provide the best sensitizing schema available for the study of female same-sex relationships as a legitimate family form.

### CHAPTER THREE REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Recall that in the previous chapter it was argued that language, as both a cultural and an academic phenomenon, worked to exclude female sexually based primary relationships from the status of a family form. Rather, these relationships moved from tolerance and acceptance by society (albeit acceptance as an “alternative” relationship), to relationships that were perceived as degenerate or illegal. As such, scholars have consistently approached the study of lesbian dyads as a form of “alternative lifestyle” rather than as a form of family. In point of fact, to have approached research on lesbian sexually based primary relationships as equivalent to “family” would have resulted in academic suicide due to sociological acceptance of societal and sociological definitions (D’Emilio, 1983; Martin and Lyon, 1972; Miller, 1995; Penn, 1991). Thus, until the late 1970s the sparse psychological and sociological literature on the subject of lesbian couples was never done under the rubric of family studies.

As discussed earlier, the European sexologists were the first to research “sexual inversion” in relationship to female same-sex relationships. The period between the discovery of “sexual inversion” and the mid 1950s did not see much in the way of academic pursuits regarding lesbian pairings. In point of fact, the only two studies that mentioned lesbian women did so as a footnote within the larger context of studies on the sexual activities of women (Davis, 1929; Kinsey et al., 1953). However, since both Davis

and Kinsey were primarily interested in sexual activities, no information was solicited regarding primary relationships forged between two women.

The next big surge in research focusing on lesbian women occurred in the late 1950s. While the subject of lesbianism fascinated scholarly researchers, the closeted nature of the lesbian community prevented access to any type of sample. Additionally, many of the scholarly researchers were heterosexual males and this presented another block to access (Martin and Lyon, 1972). Not to be deterred, researchers discovered women's prisons.

Women's prisons were seen as the perfect laboratory in which the creation of lesbian partnerships could be studied. Ellis' influence regarding research agendas is quite evident in these early works. The mannish-woman, or butch, was seen not only as the true lesbian but as the corrupting influence on women who were deemed "feminine" (and by extension, heterosexual) by researchers. During this era of research, it was suggested that the mannish-woman became homosexual due to her lack of attractiveness to the opposite sex. In the normal human search for love or a sense of "we-ness," this unattractive woman was unsuccessful in her attempts at heterosexual pairings; therefore, she turned her attention to other women. Most of the information collected during this time dealt with the psychopathic nature of the true lesbian, her unattractiveness to males, and the sexual practices of lesbian dyads (Kates, 1955; Kitsuse, 1962; Ovesey, 1956), although the theoretical concept of sexual inversion was the driving force of the research.

In 1965, sociologists David Ward and Gene Kassebaum published what was to become the most ground-breaking and comprehensive study of lesbian dyad and familial creation yet--*Women's Prison*. Ostensibly, this book was designed to study the prison



community and social structure; however, the over-arching subject quickly was changed to that of lesbianism:

This study began with our interest in gathering data on women in prison to see whether there were female prisoner types consistent with the reported characteristics of male prisoners. Early in the course of this study it became apparent that the most salient distinction to be made among female inmates was between those who were and those who were not engaged in homosexual behavior in prison, and further, of those who were involved, between the incumbents of "masculine" and "feminine" roles. (p. v)

The authors initially argued that their intent was to study the formation of the lesbian dyad and the manner in which lesbian families emerge in the prison setting. However, their definition of homosexuality belies their intent:

Let us state at the outset the definition of homosexuality for this study . . . we are referring to *kissing and fondling of the breasts, manual or oral stimulation of the genitalia and simulation of intercourse between two women.* (p. 80)

The authors, echoing Ellis (1913, 1936), argued that the true lesbian is the butch-woman. They theorized that the butch-woman became lesbian due to her lack of success in heterosexual pairings in the outside world. This lack of success was predicated upon her appearance: "many women in the butch role appear masculine (or at least not classically feminine) in terms of body structure and physiognomy" (p. 105). In a telling display of male heterosexual bias, the authors stated "it is our personal observation that while there are some striking exceptions, many of the butch jailhouse turnouts are singularly unattractive." (p. 105).

While it can be argued that the venue of this research was not representative of society at large, Ward and Kassebaum had a unique experience which could have served

as a model for future research on the creation of lesbian dyads. The titles of some of the chapters in the book, "Dynamics: The Course of the Love Affair" and "Dynamics: The Character of the Love Affair," suggest at least some notion of the creation and phases of dyadic relationships. However, once again, research on the lesbian dyad was turned into a treatise on the sexual exploits of lesbian women. Clearly, Ward and Kassebaum used Ellis' plan of research for their book in that the same three research questions were addressed: (1) How did the deviant behavior occur? (2) What were the physical characteristics of a true lesbian? and (3) What was the nature of the sexual activity between two women?

Throughout the above referenced research, certain trends emerged and these trends were to shape the stereotypes of lesbian dyads. First, the concept of the mannish-woman or the butch suggested that this was the quintessential true lesbian. The butch was conceptualized either as a man trapped in a woman's body or as a woman so singularly unattractive to the opposite sex that a heterosexual partner was unavailable to her. The butch woman's mission in life was to form a bonding, or a sense of we-ness, with another human being. As a bond with a heterosexual male was unavailable to her due to her physical attributes (or lack thereof), this woman had no choice but to seek partnerships with other woman--and, the object of her desire was a feminine, heterosexual female. It appears that male researchers could not accept the fact that a female who met their standards of heterosexual femininity could voluntarily view another female as the object of her desire. Coincident with this line of thinking was the generalization that lesbian dyads

consisted of one butch woman and one femme woman<sup>1</sup>. This suggested that lesbian dyads were attempts at mirroring heterosexual pairings. Beyond these patterns, no real data were gathered which referenced phases of lesbian dyad and familial creations.

### Ovarian Work on Lesbian Dyadic and Familial Construction

One of the first sociological discourses that focused on issues other than sexual activity in lesbian dyads was *Sexual Deviance* by John Gagnon and William Simon (1967). The authors suggested a cutting edge theoretical perspective for research on lesbian dyads by arguing that there is more to a lesbian couple than their sexual activity:

we must take into account the problems of managing relations with family and friends, or earning a living, of finding emotional and social support, and possibly of greatest importance, of struggling (as we all do) to accept our constantly changing selves. (p. 249)

Further, even while the chapter on lesbianism was contained in a text entitled *Sexual Deviance*, Gagnon and Simon suggested that researchers view “homosexuality in the context of general patterns of social and personal adjustment” (p. 250). This represented a dramatic departure from previous research on lesbian couples that situated lesbianism somewhere between psychopathic behavior and complete immorality.

Gagnon and Simon’s work presents the beginning of a dialogue on lesbian couples as the outcome of a search for we-ness. When asked about the formation of her present partnership, one participant explained, “right now love is very important to me. Being very near someone all the time. Wanting to love them and having them love you back” (p. 277). Another participant explained, “I guess I feel a sense of security with her. It’s not

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<sup>1</sup>For a further explanation of the characteristics of “butch” and “femme” see Weber, 1996 as referenced in the bibliography.

just sexual attraction. I don't know how to explain it. I can talk to her; she understands me. . . . There's something there that I've never had before" (p. 274).

This work further represented a break with traditional research on the creation of and maintenance of lesbian dyads in that there was recognition of universal problems affecting both heterosexual and homosexual dyads. Issues of acceptance by biological kin, acceptance by friends, the work environment, and of finding and creating partnerships were addressed in this work, albeit not in any great detail. Finally, the lesbian dyad had come out of the bedroom!

In the wake of Gagnon and Simon's groundbreaking work, there followed a spate of books and articles that attempted to ground research on lesbian dyads within the relationships themselves. Authors began to look at the interaction between lesbian partners--topics such as autonomy and power within lesbian relationships, lesbian parenting, "coming out" to biological kin, and acceptance or rejection of lesbian dyads by biological kin and heterosexual friends began to appear in both scholarly journals and the mainstream press (D'Emilio, 1983; D'Emilio and Freedman, 1988; Friedman, 1983; Harry, 1983; Levine and Leonard, 1984; Martin and Lyon, 1972; Newton, 1982; Peplau et al., 1978; Pollack and Vaughn, 1987; Rich, 1980). This work, however, consisted of essays with no empirical data.

#### Quantitative Empirical Research on Lesbian Dyads

It was not until 1983 that the most comprehensive study of lesbian couples was published. *American Couples* by Philip Blumstein and Pepper Schwartz constituted a major, ground-breaking study on the relationships and interactions between partners in many forms of the sexually based primary relationship. This study allowed all forms of

dyads to be seen as families, and attempted to understand how couples fashioned their everyday lives with respect to money, work, and sex. Ninety lesbian couples were included in the sample of this study. Blumstein and Schwartz ventured into uncharted territory with regard to the data gathered on lesbian couples. The major contributions of this work were that (1) lesbian partners were granted equal status with heterosexual sexually based primary relationships, (2) there was an implicit recognition that lesbian couples deal with the same universal issues as do the heterosexual couples, (3) Blumstein and Schwartz categorically rejected the notion that the lesbian dyad was a relationship founded and maintained solely on sexual activity, and perhaps most importantly (4) lesbian dyads were portrayed as sexually based primary relationships *sui generis*--there was no need to compare them as a deviant model of the "normal" heterosexual couple.

The publication of *American Couples* did not appear to spark any real interest among sociologists in pursuing research agendas using lesbian sexually based primary relationships as the study groups. Indeed, Allen and Demo (1995) reviewed over 8,000 articles contained in family sociological journals between 1980 and 1993. Of those articles, only 27 referred specifically to issues salient to homosexual couples and their families. It should be further noted that the majority of those 27 articles used gay men as participants--only a few examined issues relating to lesbian dyads. Areas of research with regard to lesbian sexually based primary relationships seemed to focus on two main issues: allocation of household tasks and domestic violence, but even articles on these subjects proved to be few and far between.

The issue of division of household labor has proven to be the most popular area of quantitative research among sociologists willing to use lesbian women as participants in

studies (Caldwell and Peplau, 1984, Kurdek, 1993, Reilly and Lynch, 1990). Although the findings in these studies generally indicated lesbian partners exhibited more egalitarian attitudes than other types of dyads, there were some problems with the methodology. First, some of the studies solicited responses from only one of the partners in a lesbian dyad. This provided no means of testing or checks and balances on the self-reporting of one partner. Second, many of the studies asked general and vague questions about household tasks. For example, a popular question centered around the participants "feeling" about the division of household tasks. There is a huge difference between the *perception* and the *reality* of egalitarianism. That is, while the above mentioned researchers argue that lesbian partners are indeed egalitarian, what their findings show is that the women *perceive* an equal sharing of household tasks. However, the findings in these studies do not support the reality inasmuch as the respondents were not asked about who performs specific tasks and how often these tasks are performed.

Domestic violence between partners in lesbian dyads was a subject broached by Schilit, Lie, and Matagne (1990) and Renzetti (1992). For the most part, these studies have concentrated on the correlation between substance abuse and domestic violence, although Renzetti broadened the scope and looked at social-psychological variables as well. Again, only one partner in a lesbian dyad participated in the research and the participants were exclusively the battered partner. No research to date has collected data from both the batterer and the battered in an attempt to look for patterns among the battered and patterns among the batterers.

### Other Empirical Research Within the Realm of Family Sociology

A relatively new field of study dealing with issues of lesbian relationships has emerged, led by feminist and lesbian theorists and historians. Much of this work is historical in nature, and consists of anecdotal and archival research. Two general themes emerge from this body of work: (1) the lesbian orientation and its place within the larger framework of a heterosexual society is explored and (2) the formation of a lesbian community is examined. With few exceptions, the process of individual lesbian sexually based primary relationships, including the formation, maintenance, and dissolution phases is ignored. For example, in *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, Faderman (1991) explores the history of lesbian women in twentieth century America. While a powerful indictment of mainstream attitudes and discrimination against lesbian women, Faderman's research does not look at the formation of families/dyads by lesbian women.

Nor is Faderman's (1991) approach to lesbian research alone within this genre of qualitative work. Much of the recent literature on lesbian women explores the formation of lesbian communities within the twentieth century meaning and experience of lesbian sexual orientation within a dominant heterosexual orientation (Ardill and O'Sullivan, 1990; Butler, 1991; Caldwell and Peplau, 1984; Carter, 1992; D'Emilio, 1983; E'Emilio and Freedman, 1988; Harry, 1983; Kennedy and Davis, 1995; Lott, 1994; Penn, 1991; Rich, 1980; Rosenzweig and Lebow, 1992; Sedgwick, 1989; Thorne, 1993; Tyler, 1991; Weston, 1993). Typically, this body of literature ignores the concept of female sexually based primary relationships as forms of family.

There is one example of qualitative research that specifically grounds lesbian sexually based primary relationships within the realm of "family." Further, this work

situates the dyad within a larger framework of “family,” showing the relationship of the homosexual dyad to fictive kin, biological kin, extended families, chosen families, and the gay/lesbian community.

In *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship*, anthropologist Kath Weston (1991) explores the ways in which lesbian women and gay men re-invent and re-create the concept of family. Participant observation and qualitative interviews were employed in her study, conducted in San Francisco, California in 1985 and 1986. Weston makes three powerful arguments: First, she rejects the functionalist paradigm in family studies; second, she posits that families constructed by lesbian women and gay men are equivalent to the families constructed by heterosexual women and men through legal marriage and procreation; third, she rejects the ideology that makes the symbiotic relationship between marriage and procreation the only basis for true family form. She argues,

What gay kinship ideologies challenge is not the concept of procreation that informs kinship in the United States, but the belief that procreation *alone* constitutes kinship, and that “nonbiological” ties must be patterned after a biological model (like adoption) or forfeit any claim to kinship status. (p. 34)

Throughout her book, Weston weaves in information gleaned from participants regarding formation of their own new families; the ways in which newly created gay and lesbian families interact with biological kin, as well as fictive kin. There is the sense that the lesbian/gay community of which Weston speaks serves effectively as a primary group for the participants in her study. While Weston’s work is important in that it is the first major work that grounds lesbian relationships within the “family” framework, her intent was to examine the general concept of families within the lesbian/gay subculture in San Francisco.



Thus, there is no concentration on the process of the individual lesbian dyad, which includes the formation, maintenance and change, dissolution phases.

This chapter reviewed the general literature on female sexually based primary relationships. Six specific topics within these relationships are examined in this study: how the participants perceive their relationships in comparison to “family”; formation of the dyad; movement from formation to maintenance/change; allocation of household tasks; financial resource management; and domestic violence. Specific literature reviews on these topics are located in the respective chapters.

## CHAPTER FOUR METHODS

### Introduction

Researcher bias is a topic with which the founders of sociology grappled. Among others, Durkheim (1982 trans.), Spencer (1877), and Weber (1949 trans.) all addressed the issue of researcher bias. Each recognized that the choice of research topic is, fundamentally, a personal choice. However, each cautioned that the researcher must guard against conceiving “the natures of other men in terms furnished by our own feelings and ideas” (Spencer, 1877, p. 145). Further, these thinkers mandated that researchers report their own individual biases to the reader:

it should be constantly made clear to the readers (and--again we say it--above all to one's self) exactly at which point the scientific investigator becomes silent and the evaluating and acting person begins to speak (Weber, 1949 trans., p. 60).

In keeping with these guidelines, I am compelled to discuss the reasons for the undertaking of this project as well as my personal biases with regard to the project. In 1993 a very close female family member confided in me that she is lesbian. To say that I was stunned would be an understatement. After all, this woman did not fit the literary and cultural stereotypes of “lesbian.” However, my love and concern for this individual created a desire to learn about her world so that I could assist her, in a well-informed manner, in her journey through life. As a budding sociologist, my first move was to search the literature for answers. Thus, my original biases were twofold: concern and ignorance.

The literature review proved to be the impetus for my third bias: outrage. As outlined in Chapter Two of this text, what smattering of literature there is on the subject amounts to an anthology on the congenital defectiveness, immorality, and illegality of homosexual sexual activity. The possibility that lesbian couples are a legitimate family form is ignored. It follows that there was little interest on the part of researchers to explore the facets of lesbian dyadic and familial formation, maintenance, change, and dissolution in the same manner that heterosexual pairings and families are explored. Thus, as a result of my own quest for knowledge and the lack of a sociological knowledge base, I chose to try to look at lesbian couples in some new ways.

As research on this topic is extremely limited, there was no real blueprint to follow with regard to methodology. However, ensconced in some of a smattering of literature dealing with same-sex couple counseling are hints for researchers who might be in need of research designs in the study of lesbian pairings. Brown (1989) argues that attempting to “fit” lesbian relationships into a model designed to explain heterosexual pairings is an exercise in futility. Due to the diversity and complexity of lesbian dyads, researchers must first understand the dimensions of these relationships through “detailed, wholistic accounts of the daily lives of gay and lesbian families” (p.320). Similarly, Laird (1993) argues that we place lesbian meanings and beliefs in the center of research on the relationships between female same-sex pairings. Using these slim guidelines as a starting point, the methodology began to emerge.

First, I determined that this research would not focus on sexual activity. Not only has this issue been looked at before, but a focus on the topic of sexual activity among lesbian women runs several risks. These risks include, but are not limited to, (a) making

moralistic value judgments by the researcher and/or reader, (b) diminishing other important aspects of a dyadic relationship, and (c) alienating the participants in the study. Second, the focus on the research agenda would encompass aspects of lesbian dyads that deal with the formation, maintenance, and change phases of the relationship. As the participants in this study are all in committed relationships, information regarding the dissolution phase is beyond the scope of this work. Finally, the research agenda was designed to give voice to the participants in this study: to enable them to tell their stories in their own way and through their own shared meanings.

### Research Design

First a 21 page questionnaire was designed (See Appendix A). The questionnaire is composed of 109 close-ended questions and 9 open-ended questions. The close-ended questions were divided into five parts:

Part I	Personal demographics
Part II	General questions regarding formation, maintenance, and change stages of the dyadic relationship
Part III	Questions regarding handling of finances within the relationship
Part IV	Social-psychological questions regarding the relationship
Part V	Questions and Likert scale measuring domestic abuse within the relationship

The open-ended questions were designed to elicit qualitative data regarding attraction between partners, negotiation tactics, and policy implications.

In addition to the questionnaire, unstructured interviews were gathered from participants who volunteered. These interviews were geared toward gathering information regarding definition of terms within the lesbian sub-culture, negotiation tactics employed by partners, and concerns and worries that partners have--both with regard to their relationships and with regard to life journeys. While I used a general, pre-conceived

guideline for the unstructured interviews, typically the interviews served as a venue wherein those women who chose to participate discussed topics of importance to them. Topics discussed included their dyadic relationships, child-raising issues, their frustration at being perceived as “different” by society, and job-related issues.

The close-ended questions contained in the research instrument serve as the tools of the natural science model of discovery and provide data for quantitative analysis. Inasmuch as the participants were gathered via snowball sample, it is inappropriate to use inferential statistics that require probability samples. Any statistical findings presented in this study are not generalizable, but refer only to the research sample. Both the open-ended questions and the unstructured interviews yield qualitative data which provide a grounding for the quantitative data and give us a better understanding of the structural and individual forces that affect social interaction among the participants and their partners.

### Data

#### General Information

The data for this study were collected by the author between March, 1993 and March, 1994. Data were collected from Jacksonville, Florida; Gainesville, Florida; Miami, Florida; Atlantic City, New Jersey; and East Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania. The research and data collection were funded entirely by the author.

#### The Sample

The original sample consisted of 235 women, many of whom were single.. However, the sample yielded 168 usable participants for this dissertation. Those used in this study are the women who are (1) in committed relationships and (2) whose partners participated in the study with them.

The participants ranged in age from 18 to 63 with a mean of 36 and a mode of 31. Income ranged from \$ 0 to well over \$150.00 per annum. The mean, median, and mode fell within the \$20,000 to \$30,000 per annum range. Educational attainment of the participants ranged from "Some high school" to "Post-Doc" studies, with the average participant having had at least some college. The racial/ethnic composition of the participants is as follows:

	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
White	157	93%
African American	6	4%
Hispanic	2	1%
Asian	2	1%
Unreported	1	1%
TOTAL	168	100%

There was a wide array of occupations among the participants: mechanics, teachers, nurses, physicians, attorneys, secretaries, airline pilots, landscapers, college students, clergy, and social workers were among the occupations listed.

With regard to their relationships in general, 84% of the participants have been involved in at least one cohabiting lesbian dyad that lasted longer than three years. Fifty-percent of the participants have been involved in two or more cohabiting relationships that lasted longer than three years.

Regarding current relationships, 51% of the participants dated their partners no longer than 6 months before moving in together. The average length of current cohabiting dyad within the sample is 3 years, with a mode of 6 years. Twenty-percent of the sample reported having had their relationships sanctified through Holy Union or some other religious ceremony, 43% have not, and 37% did not respond to the question.

### Methods of Data Collection

Locales. Due to the closeted nature of the lesbian community it is impossible to define the lesbian population. As such, it is impossible to collect a random sample for a study such as this, so a snowball sample was the only logical choice. The goal in collecting the sample was to gather a sample as diverse as possible with regard to socio-demographic variables. Thus, rather than target women's bookstores where a large percentage of the clientele would likely be well educated, middle class women, the net was broadened to include venues where working class lesbian women might likely be found. Initially, social settings in which lesbian women gather were targeted, specifically lesbian bars and churches. Care was taken to target bars and nightclubs that cater both to working class women and middle class women, and research was conducted in both types.

Recognizing that alcohol consumption could pose a problem, I arranged with the owners of the bars and nightclubs to open the establishments several hours before the normal operating hours. These owners worked with me by advertising the project several weeks in advance, so participants who arrived to take part in the study knew that the establishments were open for the sole purpose of research. This rendered alcohol consumption by participants a moot point. By networking with women whom I met in the initial bar and nightclub settings, other venues became available.

Lesbian bars were the first locale targeted in my attempt to find a sample for this study. Initially, I thought that being straight would hinder my ability to gather a sample. However, my first attempt proved otherwise. I targeted a working class lesbian bar in Jacksonville, Florida and made a personal visit to the bar early on a Saturday evening. I found the place deserted, so talking with the owner proved to be an easy task. (I later

found out that lesbian bars are typically empty until about 10:00 p.m., after which the clientele crowds in.) I introduced myself to the owner of the bar as a researcher whose interest was issues that touch lesbian women in ways that the heterosexual majority cannot imagine: issues such as family, coming out, work issues, child rearing, and the like. I made sure to emphasize the fact that I was not interested in what goes on in the bedrooms of female partners, but rather I was interested in how they negotiate life journeys within a culture that perceives them as “different.” The owner of this bar was a 65-year-old woman who was in a 20 year relationship with another woman. She questioned me extensively regarding issues dealing with my sexual orientation, my feelings toward homosexual orientations, and my motives both personally and professionally. Ultimately, I explained to her that a very close female relative had informed me that she is lesbian and that I wanted to understand what her life would be like given her orientation. I was very honest with her with regard to the literature that was available on lesbian couples, and I explained that I wanted to determine the veracity of this literature. Further, I advised her that should my findings replicate the few available findings, that I would have to report this. Conversely, if my findings were different from those available, I would report this as well. Above all, I stressed that I wished to give the participants a chance to tell their story and to assist me in understanding the meanings of symbols, language, and concepts within their own sub-culture. After meeting with me for two hours, and checking my credentials to insure that I was not the police or an investigator seeking “dirt” on certain clients, she was satisfied. At that point, she gave me permission to use her establishment to in my research. She was also quite helpful in suggesting other venues in which research could be conducted.



In some instances, women did not feel comfortable participating in the research in a public setting, however, they were interested in being a part of this study. On separate occasions, two women offered to hold home parties (one in Florida and one in New Jersey) wherein they would invite friends and acquaintances for the specific purpose of taking part in this research. I agreed and traveled to the home parties where I monitored the completion of questionnaires and subsequently interviewed participants. The way in which these home parties were initiated follows.

Attached to the questionnaire was a form that explained the procedure of the research. Included in that form was my name and telephone number, and the express purpose given for revealing my name and number was for participants to contact me should they wish to withdraw their participation in this study. From the first bar as well as the resort in the northeast, I received two calls. These calls were from women whose friends had participated in the study. Both women explained that they were deeply closeted due to the nature of their professions. Both indicated that should it become common knowledge that they were lesbian, they would lose their jobs. Thus, they did not frequent establishments or events wherein their orientation might be revealed. However, in learning about the study from friends, they wished to participate and contacted me to determine whether a home party type of venue could be arranged. I explained that I was quite open to that, and dinner parties were then arranged. Each party yielded 5 couples (10 participants each). All twenty of the participants were deeply closeted, and once again, I had to verify my status by using my student identification card. The participants also requested my word that anonymity was assured, and I gave this promise. Many of the participants at these home parties referred to each other by pseudonyms, and at no

time was I privy to the surnames of any of the participants. On both occasions, dinner was served and I was inundated with questions concerning my sexual orientation, nature of my study, the purpose of the study, and the ultimate goal of the study. After dinner, I was asked to leave the room while the women decided whether or not they would participate. Within a few minutes, on each occasion, I was asked back into the room and all twenty of the women participated in this study.

During the research time frame, two Gay Pride Picnics had been scheduled in two separate north Florida cities. I contacted the steering committees of the picnics and arranged to rent booths at the events. A sign was placed in front of the booth that said "Women's Survey" and I waited for participants to approach. The area where my booth was situated provided low concrete walls where participants could sit and complete the questionnaires while I looked on. The area was also conducive to my speaking with the participants regarding the purpose of the study, and with regard to instructions for completing the questionnaire. It also allowed the physical separation of partners.

The first Gay Pride Picnic in which I rented a booth was in Jacksonville, Florida. The picnic was held at Metropolitan Park. I had expected a small turnout at my booth since the picnic provided entertainment in the form of musicians, softball games, and the like. In addition, there was real camaraderie among the picnic-goers. Thus, I only brought a total of 75 questionnaires to the picnic. This proved to be a mistake. Within the first 30 minutes of the opening of the picnic, women began gathering at my booth. I explained to them what the survey was about and women began volunteering to participate. I was handing out questionnaires and arranging the participants on the concrete wall. Before the first hour was over, 60 women were in the process of

completing questionnaires. Within two hours, I was completely out of surveys and women were still coming up to me wanting to participate in the study. Finally, I had no alternative but to tell them about upcoming dates and sites where the survey would be administered. In retrospect, I have come to realize several things. First, prior warnings I had been given about the inaccessibility of closeted groups proved invalid. Second, taking too many questionnaires to a research site is preferable to taking too few. Third, truthfulness and being completely forthright with possible participants is profoundly important. Possible participants, especially those who could be placed at risk by participating in research, are very open with respect to what they expect in terms of participation. Similarly, an open and honest approach on the part of the researcher seems to open avenues of research that may, on the surface, appear to be unavailable. Early on, I realized that my heterosexual orientation might be questioned in terms of my ability to objectively perform research on those whose orientation was different. When asked, I explained that the data would guide my path, not any preconceived notions of "normal." I was also very honest about the purpose and goals of my study. I answered any question that was posed as honestly as I could, and the participants truly seemed to appreciate this.

Finally, I learned of a resort in the northeast whose clientele consisted solely of gay men and lesbian women. Upon contacting the owners I learned that one of the women was a retired Professor of Sociology at a northeastern university. She was quite excited about the project and arranged to hold a "Women Only" weekend in order to facilitate this research project. The weekend was a huge success in terms of numbers of participants and data collection.

I learned of this resort from two women who had participated in the study at the Jacksonville Gay Pride Picnic. I placed a telephone call to the resort and was able to speak with one of the owners. When I began to explain the purpose of my call, she asked me to hold so that she could have the other owner (her partner) join in the conversation. We discussed at length the study: the purpose, focus, etc. Again, I was asked many questions regarding issues such as protecting the identity of the participants, the focus of the study, and the like. Ultimately, the owners agreed that they were very interested in participating in this research. They agreed to set aside one weekend specifically for women, and they asked me to send them fliers and posters advertising the date, time, and place of the study. This was done and the advertisements were express mailed to the owners of the resort. Posters were placed in conspicuous places around the resort area, and the fliers were sent along with the resort's newsletter to clients of the resort. The advertising blitz was sent out approximately one month prior to the date we had set for the women's weekend. I traveled to the resort and spent Friday night, and all day Saturday and Sunday gathering data. The owners had set up a large table in the lobby for use in the study and had arranged several tables and chairs throughout the lobby for participants to use while completing questionnaires. Those who wished to participate in the unstructured interviews were then instructed to come to the large table where we sat around and talked. Over the course of the weekend 125 questionnaires were completed and eighteen women participated in unstructured interviews.

Data collection. The primary instrument of research is the above mentioned questionnaire. These surveys were coded so that the researcher could determine whether the participant was single or partnered. In addition, the questionnaires of those women

who were partners were coded so that specific or aggregate partner information could be analyzed. Prior to the collection of any data, permission was obtained for this project through the University of Florida's Institutional Review Board.

Sealed questionnaires were handed to each participant by the researcher. A consent form was given to each participant to read, and the form was read aloud by the researcher. Additional instructions were then read to the participants. Women accompanied by their partners were asked to physically separate while they answered the questionnaires, insuring that there was no pressure exerted on any of the women completing the survey. The women were asked to refrain from conversation with anyone while they were answering the questionnaire. Participants were allowed to take as much time as they wished. Typically, it took about one hour to complete the survey. Upon completion, the participants sealed the survey in an envelope provided, then returned it to the researcher.

The completion of all surveys was done in the presence of this author. Anonymity was guaranteed to all participants.<sup>1</sup> At no time were the names of the participants used or even known by this researcher. Numerical codes were given to all participants.

After completion of the questionnaires, the women were invited to participate in round table types of unstructured interviews. The subject matter of the interviews typically dealt with the dyadic relationships enjoyed by the participants. The interviews considered many subjects: issues regarding negotiation of tasks and finances; employment

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<sup>1</sup>To guarantee total anonymity was impossible inasmuch as I was a guest in homes of some of the participants. However, anonymity to the extent that I did not know the participants' names was guaranteed.

and financial issues; issues relating to the raising of children; even social issues with which they, as lesbian families, were concerned were discussed.

### Operationalization

Inasmuch as the research focus is the lesbian dyad as a process, the operationalization does not necessarily rest upon the correlation of one type of quantitative variable with another. Instead, there is a melding of quantitative and qualitative data so that a picture can emerge as to the realities of the process of the relationships.

As discussed earlier, this study examines six specific topics with regard to female sexually bonded primary relationships. First, the participants explain how they perceive their relationships--are they "families" or "alternative lifestyles"? Second, we look at the formation phase of the relationship. This phase of the relationship is exemplified by attractions between the partners. This attraction is examined by looking at where partners met each other and "shared behavior patterns" (Scanzoni et al., 1989).

Next, we examine the actual movement from formation to the maintenance/change phase. This movement is exemplified by commitment of the partners to a relationship. The commitment is operationalized in this study by the act of moving in together. The hypotheses explored in this section are 1A--the partners in sexually based primary relationships whose union has been sanctified are more likely to be out to their families, 1B--the partners in sexually based primary relationships whose union has been sanctified are more likely to be out to their co-workers; 1C--those couples who have had their unions sanctified are more likely to have met at church.

The next areas of examination are issues that pertain to the maintenance/change phase of any sexually based primary relationship. First we examine the allocation of household labor. Hypothesis 2A is household division of labor among partners in a lesbian dyad is not predicted by gender identity (i.e., “butch” and “femme”); 2B is household division of labor is not predicted by economic resources.

Next, we examine the handling of economic resources and bill paying. Hypothesis 3A is pooling of economic resources is related to length of relationship. That is, the longer the relationship, the more likely the partners are to pool their economic resources. Hypothesis 3B is distribution of payment of shared bills is unrelated to economic resources. That is, it is predicted that the women in dyads share equally common bills such as rent, utilities, and groceries.

Finally, we examine domestic abuse. This area could encompass both the maintenance/change phase and dissolution phase of sexually based primary relationships. However, as all of the couples in this sample were still together at the time of the data collection, we cannot speak to the dissolution phase. This examination is quite lengthy and involves data on perpetrators of domestic violence and victims of domestic violence. The hypotheses with regard to perpetrators are 4A--a gender identity of “butch” is unrelated to the commission of physical violence; 4B--as a partner ages she is less likely to commit acts of physical violence; 4C--the commission of physical violence against a partner is not related to financial inequities; and 4D--poor quality of relationship is related to increased rates of battering by a perpetrator.

The hypotheses with regard to victims of domestic violence are 5A--those who self-report as victims of partner physical abuse are likely to deny that the abuse exists;

5B--women who self-report as victims of partner physical violence are likely to (a) excuse the perpetrator's behavior and (b) believe that they (the victims) can help the perpetrators end the cycle of violence.

It should be noted that the testing of hypotheses by quantitative and qualitative analyses in this dissertation are not ends unto themselves. Rather, the analyses are tools used in this study to examine the process of relationships. That is, we are looking for clues regarding the negotiation and compromise strategies that are employed by partners in order to sustain a relationship. In so doing, we also are able to see the fluidity of the process by which couples move back and forth between phases of the relationship. The *process* is key, not the associations between variables. Further, since the sample is not a probability sample, no inferences can be made from the analyses.



## CHAPTER FIVE WE ARE FAMILIES

As stated in the previous chapter, the research agenda for this study was designed to give voice to the participants: to enable them to tell their stories in their own way and within their own shared meanings. Thus, it is essential to allow the women to describe and define their dyadic relationships. Do they perceive themselves as living an “alternative lifestyle” or being part of a “family?”

The final question on the survey that the women completed was an open ended question: “If I could speak before the United States Congress, I would explain to the members what it is like to be a lesbian in America. I would say . . .” Many patterns emerged in the responses, but for the purpose of this study, the responses that speak to the issue of how the participants perceive their relationships follow.

A 47-year-old teacher responded,

I am just like anyone else. Let me live my life, contribute to society, worship my God, and love the person that God has blessed me with. Protect my rights to live as God created me.

A 49-year-old secretary stated,

I would like to be able to marry the person I choose to with all marital rights, just like everybody else: to legally be next of kin as husbands and wives are. I would say, Give me the rights and freedom to live my life just as you live your life. Do not look upon me as a freak because my family consists of me and another woman.

From a 31-year-old security officer,

It is frustrating to be in love with someone and have to hide the fact because we are at risk of losing our jobs. Insurance companies should open up and allow policies for gay couples. We should be able to legally marry and raise our children without interference from church and state. We have rights just like every other person who lives in the U. S. We love and raise our children and our families the same way that straight people do.

From a 47-year-old loan processor,

I love and support my parents. I love and support my children. I love and support my mate. I work hard and try to help others. I am honest and loving and fair. In short, I'm just like all of you hope and claim to be.

From a 46-year-old entrepreneur,

Prejudice and abuse is on the rise once again and it scares me. We need national laws to protect our rights as human beings. We just want to have the same rights that are guaranteed to everyone else. I want to be able to marry. I want to be able to adopt children without additional problems. I want to be able to be a family in public. I want spouse status for health benefits

From a 31-year-old apartment manager,

We are the same loving unit as a heterosexual couple and should receive the same rights.

From a 35-year-old Department of Defense worker,

I am a valid and vital human being. I am a taxpayer, a property owner, a veteran, a professional, and also happen to be a lesbian. It is one aspect of who I am, yet it is the only aspect by which I am judged. I am happy, loved, and loving, why am I not also protected by law to have the rights that others have? I am an American, born and raised, just as all of you, yet I am branded "different." We have no breaks in the tax code for being married, we have no reduced insurance rates as a family, (medical or auto), we are not "joint income households." We are legally considered to be two people, not one couple.

From a 32-year-old military officer,

I must live two lives. In one life I am a very successful and decorated military career woman, entrusted with the management of millions of dollars of equipment and am responsible for 60 personnel and their well

being. I am trusted to make decisions based on my best judgment and have earned the respect of both my rank and myself. This life could be destroyed by my other life--I am a lesbian. My family is my partner and our children. I love and support my family, but I cannot acknowledge this family publicly for fear of retaliation. I have a very normal and caring private life, but the problem is that it is completely private and must remain private out of fear. Discipline the misconduct of behavior, not the orientation of an individual!

From a 40-year-old social worker,

Why do the laws insist upon making us "different"? We are no different than straight couples and families: we love, we fight, we work, we laugh--we are families. Why should the choice of our partners make a difference?

From a 32-year-old teacher,

Every day at work, my coworkers share their joys and sorrows that deal with their family lives. I do not have that luxury. While I have joys and sorrows that deal with my family life, I cannot talk about any of them because that would label me "perverted." My partner and I have a wonderful family life (we each have kids), but under the laws of this country, my family does not exist. Allow me to live as you do and to have the same rights that you take for granted.

From a 31-year-old accountant,

Lesbianism isn't "catching" and we're not sick. We're human beings and productive members of society. Marriage, children, insurance benefits and tax breaks should not be the exclusive right of heterosexual Americans. Why don't our families count?

From a 29-year-old student,

Sometimes it feels like being a prisoner in a free world. Every time I feel like I can be myself and live my life with my family, something or someone reminds me that I can be fired (again) or killed because of who I love. I fought for my country, got shot at and never complained. But, me and my family face greater danger in our own country because of our orientation. Allow me and my family the same privileges and rights that you have.

Finally, from a 36-year-old school counselor,

I love my child. I work. I pay taxes. I follow the 10 Commandments. I have friends and relatives that love me and I love them. I would help

anyone in their time of need. I live next door, in a clean house, manicured yard, with my spouse, my child, and two dogs. I'm so normal that I'm boring. Yet, while I call her my spouse, I cannot legally marry the love of my life. While I love and support and care for my child, she could be taken away from me at the drop of a hat. While I have a responsible job at which I am very good, I could get fired without recourse. While I pay taxes, I cannot claim "head of household" or file jointly with my partner. While I follow the 10 Commandments, many churches will not allow me to attend their services.

My family and friends are the most important things in my lives, yet if many of my friends knew what my family included, they would cease to be my friends. How can this be? Because I am a lesbian and according to the laws of this country and the moral judgments of most of you in Congress, I am a pervert that should not be allowed to exist. Please, please realize that we are normal, decent human beings with much to contribute. We are no different than you are: our families are no less important to us than yours are to you. Help balance the laws in this country to allow us the same rights and privileges that the heterosexual world takes so for granted!!

Scanzoni et al., (1989) argue that expanding the "family" paradigm would allow for a "truer or more valid fit between reality and this broader image" (p.268). Indeed, the women who participated in this study seem to have grasped this concept. They recognize that they have recreated and reinvented the concept of family in order to make their lives better and in such a way as to allow them to grasp "we-ness." Clearly, the women in this study perceive their relationships to be families--they do not see themselves as living an "alternative lifestyle."

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE FORMATION PHASE: BEGINNING THE PROCESS

Scanzoni et al. (1989) argue that the formation phase of a relationship can be characterized by two distinct elements: shared behavior patterns and participation in choices and control. Shared behavior patterns among individuals who are in a formation phase of a dyadic relationship can be exemplified by activities shared on dates. Brickman (1987) suggests that these shared activities allow a venue for exploring positive attributes of the potential partner. Participation in choices and control represents a facet of the formation phase of a dyad in which the two individuals examine each other on a level other than shared activities. This exploration includes behavioral and social-psychological characteristics such as character, personality, negotiation skills, and the like. A crucial element included in this participation in choices and control segment of the formation phase is the desire on the part of the potential partners to explore possible commitment. Both potential partners evaluate each other in terms of what each can bring into a potential relationship, but also in terms of personal gratification. That is, each potential partner is essentially determining "what can she give the relationship, and what can she give me personally?"

Considering both elements of the formation phase allow the participants to examine positive and negative characteristics of potential partners. Further, as argued by Scanzoni et al. (1989), the formation phase of a sexually based primary relationship is not necessarily linear. That is, there is no guarantee that the formation phase will move onto

the maintenance/change phase. Instead, the formation phase is an avenue of exploration wherein each potential partner can decide whether or not the relationship should move into the maintenance/change level. However, for the purpose of this study we can assume that the formation phase did culminate into the maintenance/change phase as the participants are in committed relationships. We now explore the findings with regard to the formation phase of lesbian dyadic relationships within the rubric offered by Scanzoni et al. (1989).

### Shared Behavior Patterns

The exploration of the formation phase of a sexually based primary relationship demands that we begin with the basics. What attracts potential partners to each other in the first place? A starting point in this exploration is how and where potential partners meet each other. In fact, the couples who participated in this study provide ample data in this regard.

Table 5.1: Frequency Table of Meeting (n=84 couples)

<u>Place</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Church	9	11%
Gay/Lesbian Bar	19	23%
Introduced by Mutual Friends	25	30%
Dating Service	1	1%
Professional/Political Meeting	5	7%
College	10	12%
Convent	1	1%
Participants in Sporting Events	6	7%
Gay Pride picnics/events	1	1%
Place of Employment	<u>6</u>	<u>7%</u>
	84	100%

Interviews with the participants indicate that the initial shared behavior patterns were very important in the formation stages of their relationships, but further, that these shared behavior patterns continue even today. For instance, two 43-year-old women who are in a committed relationship originally met at work--one is a real estate broker and the other is a real estate agent in the same office. The fact that both had shared interests in thriving and fulfilling careers was very important to them initially. As professional women in a very competitive industry, they found a common ground for their burgeoning dyadic relationship.

Similarly, a 47 and a 48-year-old who met while they were practicing nuns in a convent, found that their shared behavior patterns were crucial to the formation phase of their relationship. In this instance, both were grappling with major life crises that included recognition of their sexual orientation, decisions about whether to leave the convent, fear at the possibility of being excommunicated from the Catholic Church, and facing a life journey outside of the cocoon of a convent. The ability to share these fundamental life decisions together was a critical factor in the formation phase of their relationship. Obviously, this was also a good foundation for their partnership in that they have been together for 23 years.

A 33-year-old respiratory therapist and a 41-year-old private investigator met as members of a women's basketball team. Through participation on this team, they found that they had many shared behavior patterns--a dedication to physical fitness, to proper nutrition, and a well-ness orientation toward health were among them. These women explained that factors such as these were stepping stones that they used to build their relationship. Even though they have now been in a committed relationship for over 5

years, they continue the shared behavior patterns that attracted them to each other in the first place.

On the surface, it might not seem that a 24-year-old optician with a 4 year college degree and a 31-year-old carpenter with no college would have any shared behavior patterns. This couple met in a lesbian bar four years ago. However, on their initial meeting they discovered that they both liked the same recreational activities: they enjoy the camaraderie of a certain lesbian bar; they have many mutual friends; and they love to dance. Their first several dates consisted of dining together and then dancing at their favorite bar. From these shared behavior patterns, they forged a relationship. Coincidentally, they continue to the present their pattern of going to their favorite bar to dance and socialize once a week.

It appears that in this sample, the place and type of initial meeting of potential partners in a sexually based primary relationship can be an indicator of the shared behavior pattern characteristic of the formation phase of a dyadic relationship. The types of initial meetings in this sample suggest that, for example, women who met in church shared similar patterns of church attendance; women who met at work shared similar occupational interests and pursuits; and women who met in college had similar behavioral patterns regarding educational pursuits. Clearly, the shared behavior patterns as a characteristic in the formation phase of the model suggested by Scanzoni et al. (1989) plays an important role.

#### Participation in Choice and Control

The second element of the formation phase of a sexually based primary relationship is what Scanzoni et al. (1989) refers to as "participation in choice and



control" (p. 109) This characteristic rests on the premise that both potential partners are looking to a goal of commitment. However, to achieve this goal, both individuals attempt to discern (a) whether or not each is open to the ultimate goal of commitment (b) whether or not each individual could contribute to a meaningful relationship and (c) whether or not each individual can provide certain gratifications to each other. This dance between partners includes the introduction of new patterns of behavior on the part of both individuals, as well as an element of negotiation with regard to what behavior will be retained in the relationship and what behavior will not.

A 46-year-old educator and a 43-year-old registered nurse who have been cohabiting for 2 years reminisced about their year long formation phase. The educator spoke first:

We met at a Democratic fund-raiser, so through our work there we gained respect for each other overall and realized that we are intellectual and political equals. We also noted that we are peers on an educational and vocational level. For both of us, learning to trust after so many cruddy relationships was hard, but we hung in there. We each had custody of 3 children, so we found ourselves negotiating immediately. When we first started dating we had to decide whether to tell our children. Then we had to deal with problems surrounding time constraints--if we had a date it was ALWAYS tentative because problems crop up with children. Then, once we became sexually involved, there was the issue of sleep-overs and how to get the children used to that. Probably, though, the one behavior of hers that caused me the most angst was the fact that she will be late to her own funeral! But, we worked everything out and I now know that she's who I've searched for all of my life.

Her partner agreed:

From the beginning it was obvious that we view the world from a very similar standpoint. Trust was a very hard bridge to build. It took time to for me to realize that she was the one person that I could completely open up to and trust. I think she got frustrated with me because the the trust was so long in coming. This trust issue was a very big deal to us at the beginning of our relationship.

The above referenced couple allowed themselves almost a year to resolve issues that are pertinent to the formation phase of a dyadic relationship. By the time they moved into the maintenance/change phase of their sexually bonded primary relationship, they had recognized problems and negotiated and compromised settlements. In contrast, we look at a 45-year old professor and a 29-year old student who dated for less than one month before moving in together. They have been cohabiting for approximately one year, but much of their relationship is still in the formation phase as evidenced by their admission of still dealing with issues regarding participation in choices and control. The professor speaks first:

We are still dealing with our relationship in the home with my three daughters, 19, 16, and 15. My partner is 16 years younger than I. She has never been with kids. She is unsure of how to relate to them, and they struggle with her role in their lives. They have admitted feeling less threatened by her than they would be by a man, but they obviously must deal with societal pressures because their mother is living openly as a lesbian. I know that they believe if I had not met her I would not be a lesbian. When things are not going well, I know that my partner believes we would all be better off without her. I have tried in every way to convince her that she is the best thing that ever happened in my life. But I must admit that there are tensions that arise as both she and the girls must learn new behaviors, and learn that my love for each is different. Another important issue that we struggle with is that having been dismissed from the Air Force for being a lesbian has left her with no job, no money, and no self esteem. I am constantly struggling to convince her that she is bright, and capable. We grapple often with her sense of worthlessness.

Her partner states,

Although she tries very hard to help me build my self-esteem and positive attitude that was destroyed after being discharged from the Air Force (after being suspected of being a lesbian), she has her own problems that affect our relationship. She is a widow from a sudden death of her husband of 19 years. It has been difficult moving in with her and 3 daughters and wanting to be seen and treated as myself. The difficulty experienced by the girls of the knowledge of their mother's

lesbianism, my partner wanting a relationship with me, and yet she has not fully grieved for her husband. Another conflict is age difference of her 46 years to my 29 years. I also get very frustrated by her being passive and allowing people (including her daughters) to take advantage of her.

Clearly, this couple's journey toward establishing a sexually based primary relationship is indicative of the nonlinear path of dyadic relationships. While attempting to move on to the maintenance/change phase of the relationship through the commitment of cohabitation, they are still negotiating the formation phase of the relationship with respect to the participation in choices and control characteristic.

Negotiating issues dealing with consanguinal and affinal kin seems to have been common with many couples in this sample. For example, a 40-year-old director of a medical group and a 45-year-old fundraiser for a nonprofit corporation detailed the lengthy formation phase of their relationship. The medical group director explained,

We dated for over 3 years before we were able to move in together--you see, I was still married to a man. Overcoming her jealousy of my kids and my husband (I'm still not yet divorced, but maybe soon) was a huge problem. She is also uninvolved with her family--she's got 2 brothers, her parents are dead. This uninvolved bothered me a lot in the beginning. My involvement with my two kids, my mother, and other family members caused a lot of friction and led to some major arguments about me not being free to be with her. I tried like hell to make her see that our future would be different from the present. I came "out" during the time that we were dating and she was pretty closeted all of her life and worried about job security. It took a long time for me to understand all of that, but I finally did.

Her partner explained,

When we began dating, she was separated but not yet divorced from a long term marriage (20 plus years) and I became impatient for her to be free to live with me. Although the divorce is still not final, she finally came to terms with the fact that I could not go on the way things were--it was me or her husband--thank God she chose me. She is very close to her family and that was hard on me--between her husband, her kids, and her mom, there didn't seem to be any time for me. We really had to work

to solve that problem! These problems seemed so huge in the beginning that I wasn't sure that a relationship would ever work out, but we were able to fix things and now we're together.

The formation phase of a sexually based primary relationship can be a pleasurable and a grueling adventure. However, it appears that for lesbian women attempting to form a dyadic relationship there are extra pressures with which they must deal in the formation phase. These extra pressures might include coming to terms with their own sexual orientation; making decisions about whether to come "out" to family, friends, and coworkers; recognizing that adopting a homosexual lifestyle will have great implications for their lives; and reconciling their orientation with their religion. In some instances, dealing with these issues while attempting to form a relationship can be overwhelming and can result in a prolonged formation phase.

This scenario was indeed the case for a 27-year-old police officer and a 25-year-old social worker. Although this couple has been cohabiting for seven years, during the first six of those years the relationship was still very much in the formation phase. This couple used their first names in their stories, but their names have been changed in this text. The social worker (Sarah) began,

Jenny and I really have a strange story. We've known each other since we were eight years old. We were both from fundamentalist religious backgrounds--you know, typical "holy-rollers". My father was the preacher at our church. All through high school, we both dated boys, but we didn't realize until much later that neither one of us enjoyed it. We just weren't attracted to boys. Anyway, after high school we went away to a fundamentalist Christian college, and we were roommates. You know how it is when you leave home, especially if you were as socially ignorant as we were. We went nuts!! We discovered alcohol and pot, and loved it. One night, we got really drunk in our dorm room and we ended up in bed together. Well, I knew that I loved it, but I was afraid to ask Jenny about it. She must have been afraid, too, because we never discussed it. What we did do, though, was continue to get drunk or stoned--I know I did it in the hopes that we'd end up in bed together, and we always did. But we never talked about it.

This went on through the whole four years of college. We'd get drunk and end up in bed together, but we never discussed it.

Jenny picks up the story:

Well, we wouldn't talk about US, but we would skirt the issue sometimes, you know, we'd talk about women who like other women and stuff like that. But, we'd laugh about it and say how disgusting it was and how you would go to hell if you did stuff like that. Meanwhile, we were both going home about once a month, going to our church and acting like the good little Christian girls that we believed we were. As long as we didn't admit what we were doing, it wasn't happening.

At this point, both women were laughing. Then Sarah interrupted:

The thing is, we both really believed in our religion. And we were both really close to our families. I guess we knew in our hearts (even though we never discussed it) that if we ever admitted what we were doing, both our families and our church would turn us out on our butts and we just weren't ready for that. So, we continued our charade. After college, we moved to [city deleted] and we got jobs. Of course, we become "roommates". And the pattern continued. We rented a 2 bedroom apartment and one of the rooms was mine and the other's was Jenny's. But, we always slept in the same bed in "my" room. But we never discussed what we were doing. We would even talk about how we would get married and have children someday, but we made a pact that we would buy houses next door to each other so that we could still remain "best friends." Finally, sometime last year, Jenny came home from work and said that this shit had to stop.

Jenny takes up the story:

I just couldn't take it anymore. I'm a police officer in [city deleted], and it's a very dangerous job. My partner had gotten shot about a week before I confronted Sarah. That had really bothered me--he was married,, and his wife and family were at the hospital with him the whole time and it was wonderful the way they were close and open in front of everybody. I realized that he could have been me--if something happened to me, I wanted to make sure that at least Sarah knew how much I loved her. So, I came home and told her that we had some issues to deal with and settle. We stayed up all night talking and finally admitted to each other than we were in love and that we wanted to stay together forever.

Sarah then advised

The thing is, once we admitted this stuff to each other and ourselves, then we had to deal with all the other stuff--you know, whether or not to tell our parents, whether or not to tell our friends, and what we would do about church. We knew we couldn't go back to any church of our fundamentalist denomination. That night was a turning point, though. We cried, we laughed, and we loved, but we realized that we had to admit to the world that we were together, no matter what the repercussions were. And (laughing again) it was so great to be able to go to bed with Jenny without having to get drunk first!

Clearly, this couple was stuck in the formation phase for an inordinate length of time. The issues they had to confront, however, were very similar to other women who were interviewed. When this interview began, it was very unstructured in style--there were six women sitting at the table talking (Jenny and Sarah were two of them). However once Jenny and Sarah began to tell their story, the other women nodded in recognition. After Jenny and Sarah concluded, the women at the table spoke about having to confront most of the same issues during the time that they were forming relationships. The tone at the table was quite upbeat, however. The women at this particular interview session gave much credit to their respective partners for helping them negotiate these crucial issues. They all stated that facing these issues together, and getting each other through them, laid the foundation for moving the relationship onto a higher plane.

## CHAPTER SEVEN MOVING FROM FORMATION TO MAINTENANCE CHANGE

The formation phase of the dyadic relationship is fundamentally concerned with issues of compatibility and attraction. While the individuals are evaluating each other as potential partners, this search is predicated on a sense of “me-ness” (i.e., what can this person provide me) (Scanzoni, 1995). The maintenance/change phase of a sexually based primary relationship adjusts the level of analysis. The individuals move from a sense of “me-ness” to a sense of “we-ness” (Scanzoni, 1995). Commitment to each other as a couple and commitment to making the couple last is a major determinant of movement from formation to maintenance/change (Scanzoni et al., 1989; Scanzoni, 1995).

Commitment alone, however, does not a relationship make. In order to insure the growth and stability of the sexually based primary relationship, the partners must constantly re-adjust specific aspects of the relationship. Issues ranging from the mundane to the exceptional bombard the relationship and the partners must struggle to effect a workable pattern of negotiation and solutions to such issues. Mundane issues might include the allocation of household labor (to be explored in Chapter 8) and sharing of financial resources (to be considered in Chapter 9), while exceptional issues might encompass domestic violence (to be considered in Chapter 10). Scanzoni (1995) makes it clear that the maintenance/change phase of a sexually based primary relationship is an on-going process. There is no static or linear component to the maintenance/change phase. In fact, in a quasi-functionalist allegory, he likens the sexually based primary relationship

to a living organism and suggests that the organism must be nurtured, pruned, and fertilized in order to make it thrive (Scanzoni, 1995).

### Commitment

One of the many questions facing researchers attempting to evaluate movement from the formation phase to the maintenance/change phase of a sexually based primary relationship is "what are some identifying variables by which such movement can be assessed?" Although certainly not perfect, perhaps a starting point in answering this question is to determine a tangible action by the potential partners that defines (in their perspective) movement from formation to maintenance/change (i.e., moving from dating to commitment).

The women in this study perceive the act of moving in together as the over-riding symbol of their commitment to each other and to an ongoing relationship with each other. It should be noted that lesbian women tend to move from a formation phase to a perceived commitment phase (i.e., maintenance/change) much more rapidly than any other type couple (Blumstein and Schwartz, 1993; Carl, 1990; Krestan and Bepko, 1980). Carl (1990) attributes this tendency to escalate movement toward maintenance/change to what he calls "lesbian fusion" (p. 57). He argues that women's socialization tends "to erode boundaries between them and to fuse them dysfunctionally under stress" (p. 57). The author suggests that women typically see themselves as the binding force that (a) holds families together, (b) provides emotional support for spouse, children, and extended kin, and (c) creates a sense of bonding (i.e., Scanzoni's (1995) "we-ness"). Further, Carl (1990) argues that in the particular case of lesbian women there is added stress. First, the women recognize that they are in a subordinate position in a patriarchal society simply



because they are female. Second, their sexual orientation places them in a position of subordination with regard to the dominant “norm.” Thus, they tend to envision themselves as “two against the world” (p. 57). These factors explain his argument of fusion “dysfunctionally under stress” (p. 57), and serve to enlighten us on the propensity of lesbian women to quickly move into the maintenance/change phases of sexually based primary relationships.

Certainly, judging a time span between formation phase and maintenance/change phase is a subjective call. To critically determine the “proper” length of time between the two phases is beyond the scope of this study. Having said that, however, on the surface it appears that fulfilling the criteria of the characteristics of the formation phase (as discussed in the last chapter) might feasibly take a period of more than six months. However, as shown in Table 7.1, 51% of the participants in this study made the move from formation to maintenance/change (as measured by cohabitation) in zero to six months. This phenomenon of speeding up the process between formation and maintenance/change has not been lost on the lesbian sub-culture. Leah DeLaria is a noted lesbian comedian who has appeared in comedy clubs across the country as well as on cable networks. The one defining joke of her early career was “What does a lesbian bring with her on the second date? A U-Haul truck.” It appears that the empirical evidence provided in Table 7.1 supports both the hypotheses of researchers (Blumstein and Schwartz, 1983, Kresten and Bepko, 1980; Carl, 1990) as well as lesbian-cultural stereotypes.

Table 7.1: Frequency Chart: Length of Time Between First Date and Cohabitation (n=84 couples)

RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Less than one month	10	12%
Between one month and 6 months	33	39%
Between 6 months and 1 year	16	20%
Between 1 year and 3 years	7	8%
3 years or more	5	6%
Missing	13	15%
TOTAL	84	100%

The choice to use cohabitation rather than some form of marriage ritual as an indicator of commitment (and hence the move from formation to maintenance/change) should be addressed. The marriage ritual itself is an expression by which heterosexual couples attain recognition and legitimacy from myriad institutions within society. Family, friends, religious institutions, economic institutions, and legal institutions are involved to some extent in a heterosexual marriage ceremony. And, with the completion of the ceremony, the heterosexual couple attains a new status which is recognized worldwide. This avenue is not open to female same-sex couples. While a handful of churches now provide sanctification ceremonies for same-sex couples (Carl, 1990), the effects of such sanctification are negligible. In addition, the very idea of "marriage" in any form is anathema to many lesbian feminist thinkers. Steeped in a patriarchal tradition of ownership and subjugation of women, the concept of marriage carries much emotional and

value laden baggage. Further, recreating the *institution of heterosexual marriage* lends support to the proposition that heterosexual pairings are somehow better or normal. As Ettelbrick (1992) so eloquently argues,

marriage will not liberate us as lesbians. . . . In fact, it will constrain us, make us more invisible, force our assimilation into the mainstream, and undermine the goals of gay liberation. Second, attaining the right to marry will not transform our society from one that makes narrow, but dramatic, distinctions between those who are married and those who are not married to one that respects and encourages choice of relationships and family diversity. Marriage runs contrary to two of the primary goals of the lesbian and gay movement: the affirmation of gay identity and culture and the validation of many forms of relationships. (p.21)

To date, there has been no empirical evidence to support the suggestion that lesbian dyads neither need nor use marriage forms to define commitment. However, while not generalizable, data from this sample indicate that a sanctification ceremony is not a necessary component or indicator of commitment. Of the participants in this study, only 17 couples (20%) have had their relationships sanctified through a religious ceremony. The balance, 67 couples (80%) have chosen not to participate in any form of sanctification ritual.

Given the political climate and the public sentiment against same-sex marriages, however, the fact that 20% of the women in this sample saw fit to have their unions blessed is significant in and of itself. The question that begs to be asked is what factors would influence a couple to defy social norms and seek quasi-marital status in the only form available to them? Carl (1990) presents a powerful argument suggesting that being "out" might influence a couple's decision. He argues that the major reason for not participating in a sanctification ceremony is that such a ritual would force the couple to come out to family and friends. He suggests that such a ritual is one that is not performed

in private, but rather professes to family, friends, and the world that the relationship is one that is committed and that both partners have agreed to work toward the health and longevity of the relationship. He reasons that since most lesbian couples are closeted, from family, friends, and coworkers, they cannot risk the exposure that a sanctification ceremony might bring. Conversely, those partners who are out to family, friends, and coworkers might have less hesitation about sanctification ceremonies. Carl (1990) presents no data to reinforce his argument, however. Building on Carl's argument, however, hypotheses can be fashioned. Hypothesis 1A is the partners in dyads whose relationships have been sanctified are more likely to be out to their families. Hypothesis 1B is the partners in dyads whose relationships have been sanctified are more likely to be out to their co-workers. (Limitations of the data prevent us from looking at the variable "out to friends.")

The schema suggested by Scanzoni et al. (1989) is also useful in attempts to find determinants of behavior patterns within relationships. Recall that shared behavior patterns among partners in a sexually based primary relationship is an important characteristic. This characteristic could serve as an indicator of activities that occur throughout the relationship, which speaks to the process model defined by Scanzoni et al. (1989). While limitations of the data prevent us from looking at "religiosity," we can look at where the partners initially met each other. Assuming that having met at church is an indicator of the shared behavior of church attendance, then those who attend church might be more inclined to have their unions blessed in a sanctification ceremony. (To date, the only form of "marriage" available to same-sex couples is a religious ceremony (Carl, 1990), so issues of civil ceremonies are moot.) Thus, Hypothesis 1C is those

couples who have had their unions blessed in a sanctification ceremony are more likely to have met at church

Table 7.2 displays the relationships between having a union blessed through a sanctification ceremony and other variables that influence the decision to have a sanctification ceremony (Abbott and Farmer, 1995; Carl, 1990; Sherman, 1992) as analyzed through the use of the Phi statistic and Pearson Correlation. Use of the Phi statistic was preferable to that of the Pearson Coefficient for those variables that are categorical (out to family, out to coworkers; feminist; gender identity; and met partner in church). The Phi statistic measures association between variables in a range of 0 to +1. The Pearson Coefficient is best suited for interval variables or ordinal variables that have several categories (Agresti and Finlay, 1986). The variables education, income, and age are ordinal variables but each have several categories, thus it is appropriate to use the Pearson Coefficient in the analysis.

The variables used were out to family, out to friends, out to coworkers, whether a participant considers herself to be a feminist, a participant's gender identification (i.e., butch, femme, or independent), education, income, age, and where the partners met. In order to quantify some of the variables, they were recoded into dichotomous categorical variables. For example, the variable used to identify where the partners met was recoded into "met at church" and "did not meet at church"; the gender identification variable was recoded into responses that indicated that a participant either assumed a gender identity (i.e., butch or femme) or did not.

Table 7.2: Phi Statistics and Pearson Coefficients Between Incidence of Sanctification Ceremony (No=0; Yes=1) and Other Variables

VARIABLE	PHI	PEARSON COEFFICIENT
Out to family (No=0; Yes=1)	.2148*	
Out to coworkers (No=0; Yes=1)	.2966**	
Feminist (No=0; Yes=1)	.0186	
Butch/Femme (No=0; Yes=1)	.1823	
Education		.0943
Income		.0001
Age		-.1574
Met partner at church (No=0; Yes=1)	.3563***	

\*p < .05    \*\*p < .01    \*\*\*p < .001

Note: The inferential statistics of p would have meant statistical significance had the sample been randomly selected. However, as this is not a probability sample, no inferences can be made.

The data collected in this study, though not generalizable, supports Hypotheses 1A and 1B. In point of fact, 82% of the participants in this study are out to their families, and 48% are out to their coworkers. Having a relationship sanctified is positively associated with being out to family and coworkers.

The strongest association (positive), however, is that between “Met Partner at Church” and “Incidence of Sanctification Ceremony,” indicating that Hypothesis 1C is supported. Analysis shows that of those couples who have undergone a sanctification ceremony, the partners are more likely to have met at church. This may indicate that, just as a shared behavior in religious pursuits and activities was a foundation for the formation phase of the relationship, the maintenance and change phase is affected by the influence of this shared behavior.

The Pearson Coefficients suggest that there is no relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variables income, age, and education.

### Discussion

By looking at the process of a relationship rather than the function, we begin to fashion an equivalency of previously labeled “alternative lifestyles” to “family.” The higher order theoretical construct allows us to begin to recognize that shared patterns of behavior, participation in choices and control, commitment, and movement between phases are universal elements of any sexually based primary relationship (Scanzoni et al., 1989). In moving from concentration on *function* to concentration on *process*, the differences between the constructed dichotomy begin to blur.

### Maintaining a Sexually Based Primary Relationship

Having made a commitment to a long term sexually based primary relationship, the partners in the relationship now face the day to day realities of maintaining the relationship. The partners must negotiate, compromise, and make decisions with regard to many issues. The next chapters explore three such issues that are relevant to sexually based primary relationships in general, but specifically with regard to the dyads in this sample. The issues examined are allocation of household labor, handling of finances, and domestic violence.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### MAINTENANCE/CHANGE PHASE I

### ALLOCATION OF HOUSEHOLD TASKS

The maintenance and change phase of a sexually based primary relationship is one in which the partners continuously negotiate and compromise in order to maintain the relationship. The goal for maintenance occurs even while the relationship makes universal on-going changes. Certain issues, such as allocation of household tasks, have the potential to create friction within the relationship, thus it is essential that the partners creatively negotiate and make compromises so that any friction is diminished.

Allocation of household labor among female same-sex couples is a unique area of study, but one in which there has been limited research. Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) found that partners in lesbian dyads equally share household tasks. The questionnaire used by Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) asked questions on specific household tasks (e.g., who washes dishes, who does laundry) and the responses were coded from "I do all" to "my partner does all." However, the authors do not provide a discussion of the quantitative analysis so the readers are unable to identify methods of bivariate or multivariate analysis, nor are we able to identify independent variables used in the analyses. Both Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) and Peplau and Cochran (1990) argue that lesbian couples adopt an ethic of equity which is a result of women's realization that housework is a low status task, and that women who perform these tasks typically are reduced to a lower status. However, there is no empirical evidence presented to support this ideological argument.



Blumstein and Schwartz's (1983) study was significant in that lesbian and gay couples were included in their research plan.

Kurdek (1993), in two separate phases, sampled 61 lesbian couples in his study of allocation of household tasks. The findings in this study were quite contradictory. Overall, Kurdek states that lesbian couples tend to equally divide household tasks, although he presents no data to support this contention. Kurdek (1993) uses Pearson Correlations to compare responses between "Partner 1" and "Partner 2" with regard to performance of household tasks. Findings indicate that responses from "Partner 1" show that those partners with lower educational attainment are more likely to perform the bulk of household labor; those partners with lower incomes are more likely to perform household labor; and the partner who performs more household labor is less depressed than the partner who performs less household tasks. The responses of "Partner 2," however, show no similar findings. When the responses of both partners are merged, correlations disappear. However, Kurdek's (1993) study is important in that it was the first (and thus far the only) study that adds gender role orientation as one of the independent variables. He measured gender role orientation through the use of the Bem Sex Role Inventory (Bem, 1974).

While there is no absolute gender dichotomy in lesbian dyads, at first glance, it appears that gender would play no part in allocation of household tasks. There is evidence, however, that women do identify with specific gender identities in large numbers and it appears that Kurdek was aware of this fact. These gender identities have been categorized into (a) women who define themselves as "butch," (b) women who identify as "femme," and (c) women who remain "independent" (Weber, 1996). We know that

among heterosexual dyads, gender is the most crucial determinant of allocation of household tasks (Atkinson and Huston, 1984; Bergen, 1991; Blair and Lichter, 1991; Blumstein and Schwartz, 1993; Ferree, 1991; Shelton, 1990; Thompson and Walker, 1989). Thus, Kurdek's (1993) hypothesis that gender identity might play a role in allocation of household tasks in lesbian dyads was informed by the literature. His findings, however, showed that gender identity was not a predictor of the division of household labor.

The absence of gender identity as a predictor of the division of household labor can be explained through the meanings of "butch" and "femme" within the lesbian subculture. While previous research on gender identities of lesbian women has found that they do define themselves as "butch" or "femme" in large numbers (Ardill and O'Sullivan, 1990; Butler, 1991; Reilly and Lynch, 1990), these identities cannot be extrapolated to "butch equals male" and "femme equals female" (Weber, 1996). Instead, the gender identities adopted by lesbian women are perceived as varying degrees of "feminine." Thus, there is no reason to believe that gender identity among lesbian women would play the same role that gender plays among heterosexual couples with regard to allocation of household tasks.

Various other explanations have been offered with regard to heterosexual couples that might be helpful in exploring division of household labor between lesbian partners. It has been hypothesized that participation in household labor is a function of time availability, particularly as shaped by employment outside the home (Becker, 1981). Due to the limitations of this data set, we are unable to analyze such a hypothesis with regard to this sample.

Another explanation that has been offered with regard to heterosexual unions and division of household labor is that of control over resources. Fundamentally, this argument suggests that partners who earn more income, have higher status jobs, or higher educational attainment bargain out of performing household tasks (Blumberg and Coleman, 1989; Blood and Wolfè, 1960; Ferree, 1991; Gillespie, 1971). This explanation for household division of labor appears to be one that can translate from heterosexual unions to homosexual unions.

The first task is to determine whether or not partners in the sexually based primary relationships contained in this sample do indeed equally share household tasks or whether there is an unequal division of household labor. The jobs that are used in this study to define household tasks are encompassed in the following questions:

1. I do most of the cleaning and scrubbing chores in the house.
2. I do the cooking in our household.
3. I do the meal planning in our household.
4. I do the yardwork at our home.
5. I do the grocery shopping for us.

Taking Kurdek's lead, the sample was divided into "Partner 1" and "Partner 2." The first task is to determine whether there is equity in the responses.<sup>1</sup> Frequencies were run on the responses from "Partners 1" and "Partners 2." A visual display of the frequencies is found in Table 8.1.

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<sup>1</sup>The designation of "Partner 1" and "Partner 2" does not imply that this analysis is based upon one participant's responses versus her actual partner's responses. Rather, all of those who were labeled "Partner 1" during the administration of the surveys are categorized into one group and similarly for "Partner 2." It is recognized that this is not the optimum analytical methodology, however it does have precedent in the literature in that Kurdek (1993) uses this methodology.

Table 8.1: Frequency Distribution of Household Tasks (n=168)

VARIABLE	RESPONSE	PARTNER 1		PARTNER 2	
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Clean/Scrub	I do all/most	34	40%	48	57%
	Share equally	15	18%	14	17%
	Partner does most/all	35	42%	22	26%
Grocery Shop	I do all/most	43	51%	50	59%
	Share equally	13	16%	15	18%
	Partner does most/all	28	33%	19	23%
Cooking	I do all/most	34	41%	45	54%
	Share equally	12	14%	12	14%
	Partner does most/all	38	45%	27	32%
Planning Meals	I do all/most	32	38%	43	51%
	Share equally	13	16%	13	16%
	Partner does most/all	39	46%	28	33%
Yardwork	I do all/most	38	45%	33	39%
	Share equally	15	18%	19	23%
	Partner does most/all	31	37%	32	38%

The next task is to determine what variables are associated with performance of household tasks. The hypotheses tested are 2A--a butch or femme gender identity is unrelated to the allocation of household tasks, 2B--economic resource is related to allocation of household task (i.e., the partner with the lower income is more likely to perform more of the household tasks); 2C--lower educational attainment is associated with higher rates of performance of household tasks.

Again, analyses will be separated into "Partners 1" and "Partners 2." Due to the nature of the variables (categorical and ordinal), crosstabs were performed and the gamma statistic was used to measure association between the dependent variables and the

independent variables (gender identity; income; education). The gamma statistic accommodates measurement of association between ordinal and categorical variables, and association ranges from -1 to +1 (Agresti and Finlay, 1986). The dependent variables were re-coded into three responses (0 = Partner performs all/most; 1 = equally shared; 2 = I perform all/most). The income and education variables recoded into three responses (0 = low; 1 = medium; 2 = high). The gender identity variable was dichotomized (0 = non-femme; 1 = femme).

Table 8.2 presents a visual display of the findings. Recall that Hypothesis 2A is that a butch or femme gender identity is unrelated to the allocation of household tasks. This hypothesis is partially supported. Findings from both groups suggest that a femme gender identity is positively related to cooking so that those who self-define as “femme” are more likely to perform the cooking tasks. However, with regard to scrubbing/cleaning chores, planning meals, and grocery shopping, findings from both groups suggest weak negative relationships between a butch or femme identity and the dependent variables. Performance of yardwork and gender identity exhibit a strong positive relationship in both groups indicating that those who self-identify as femme are unlikely to perform yardwork.

Recall that Hypothesis 2B is economic resource is related to allocation of household tasks. This hypothesis is partially supported. Among both groups, there is a negative relationship between scrubbing/cleaning and income suggesting that as income increases, performance of scrubbing/cleaning tasks decreases. Similarly, among both

Table 8.2. Gamma Statistic between Various Household Tasks and Other Variables

	<u>n</u>	<u>Gamma</u>
<u>Cooking by Gender Identity</u>		
(Gender Identity coded: 0 = non-femme; 1 = femme)		
Partner 1	84	.2872
Partner 2	84	.0189
<u>Cooking by Income</u>		
(Income coded: 0 = low; 1 = medium; 2 = high)		
Partner 1	84	.1115
Partner 2	82	-.2286
<u>Cooking by Education</u>		
(Education coded: 0 = low; 1 = medium; 2 = high)		
Partner 1	82	-.0134
Partner 2	83	-.0969
<u>Scrubbing by Gender Identity</u>		
Partner 1	84	-.1682
Partner 2	84	-.3030
<u>Scrubbing by Income</u>		
Partner 1	84	-.1523
Partner 2	82	-.2894
<u>Scrubbing by Education</u>		
Partner 1	82	.1693
Partner 2	83	-.3243
<u>Grocery Shopping by Gender Identity</u>		
Partner 1	84	-.1777
Partner 2	84	-.4099
<u>Grocery Shopping by Income</u>		
Partner 1	84	-.1942
Partner 2	82	-.1996
<u>Grocery Shopping by Education</u>		
Partner 1	82	-.1389
Partner 2	83	.0891

Table 8.2 Continued

	<u>n</u>	<u>Gamma</u>
<u>Meal Planning by Gender Identity</u>		
Partner 1	84	.0391
Partner 2	84	.0052
<u>Meal Planning by Income</u>		
Partner 1	84	-.0028
Partner 2	84	-.2763
<u>Meal Planning by Education</u>		
Partner 1	84	-.0391
Partner 2	83	-.0624
<u>Yardwork by Gender Identity</u>		
Partner 1	84	.5742
Partner 2	84	.4444
<u>Yardwork by Income</u>		
Partner 1	84	.1344
Partner 2	82	-.0205
<u>Yardwork by Education</u>		
Partner 1	82	-.0444
Partner 2	83	-.1182

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(cooking, scrubbing, grocery shopping, meal planning, and yardwork are coded 0 = partner does all/most; 1 = equally shared; 2 = I do all/most)

groups, there is a negative relationship between grocery shopping and income suggesting that as income increases, the likelihood of grocery shopping decreases. With regard to cooking, the results are confounding. The findings of the group labeled "Partner 1" show that as income increases so does the likelihood of performance of cooking tasks. However, the findings of the group labeled "Partner 2" indicate that as income increases the likelihood of performance of cooking tasks decreases. Among the group labeled "Partner 1," there is virtually no relationship between planning meals and income. However, among the group labeled "Partner 2," there is a moderate negative relationship suggesting that those with higher incomes perform less of the meal planning. With regard to yardwork, the group labeled "Partner 1" exhibited a weak positive relationship between income and performance of yardwork suggesting that those with higher incomes tend to perform more of the yardwork. This may be explained in light of the gender measurement: recall that femmes tend to do less yardwork--femmes also tend to earn lower incomes than do those who label themselves either butch or independent (Weber, 1996). Yet, in the group labeled "Partner 2," there is no relationship between income and performance of housework.

Hypothesis 2C is lower educational attainment is associated with higher rates of performance of household tasks. This hypothesis is partially supported. Among both groups there is a negative relationship between cooking and education, suggesting that those with lower levels of education perform more of the cooking chores. However, the results for the dependent variables scrubbing/cleaning and grocery shopping are confounding. With regard to scrubbing chores, the findings of the group labeled "Partner 1" reflect a positive relationship between the dependent and independent variables



suggesting that as education levels increase so does the likelihood of performing scrubbing and cleaning chores. However, the findings of the group labeled “Partner 2” reflect a negative relationship between the dependent and independent variables suggesting that those with lower levels of education are more likely to perform scrubbing/cleaning chores. Similarly, the findings of the group labeled “Partner 1” reflect a negative relationship between the dependent and independent variables suggesting that as the level of education decreases, the likelihood of performing the grocery shopping increases. The findings of the group labeled “Partner 2” reflect a positive relationship between the dependent and independent variables suggesting that as the level of education increases, the likelihood of performing the grocery shopping decreases. Both groups exhibited no relationship between meal planning and education. Findings on both groups indicate that there is no relationship between performance of yardwork and educational levels.

Mention must be made mention of the difference between *reality* and *perception of reality*. While it is apparent from the above findings that there is not equity in the allocation and performance of household tasks, the women in this sample *perceive* equity in the division of household labor. Two questions were asked to measure this: (1) “My partner and I divide the household tasks” and (2) “My partner does her share of the housework.” Responses for these questions were (1) Always (2) Most of the time (3) Hardly ever and (4) Never. Responses were collapsed into two responses: “Always” and “Most of the time” became “Yes” and “Hardly ever” and “Never” became “No.” Findings indicate that an overwhelming majority of the participants (69%) believe that household tasks are divided between the partners and 79% of the participants perceive that their partners perform their share of the housework. To conclude, while there may not be true

equity in division of household labor, this sample seems not to notice. Instead, the perception of the reality by the participants is that there is an equitable distribution of household labor. The women in this study have dealt with the issue of division of household labor in a way that disallows this as an issue of tension within their relationship, thus enabling the sexually based primary relationship to continue in the maintenance/change phase.

CHAPTER NINE  
MAINTENANCE/CHANGE PHASE II:  
FINANCIAL RESOURCES AND BILL PAYING

Just as the allocation of household tasks could become a potentially fractious issue between couples, so too is the issue of financial resources and bill paying. Again, in order to maintain the relationship the partners in a dyad must negotiate and compromise in order to diminish potentially damaging effects of friction over finances.

Finances are a part of everyday life for singles as well as dyads, regardless of sexual orientation. While the general term “finances” encompasses a multitude of issues that might impact a dyad, two specific topics are explored in this study: pooling of financial resources and payment distribution of specific debts. Only one of these topics has been examined in previous research. Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) explored the topic of pooled financial resources with respect to married couples, cohabiting couples, lesbian couples, and gay couples. Their findings suggest that heterosexual, married couples pool their financial resources more than any other type of couple. They argue that the reasons for this finding are varied: First, in most states financial assets and resources of married couples are community property; second, “married couples have traditional values to turn to for guidance on this matter, and tradition suggests joint property” (p.94). Conversely, lesbian couples do not have the luxury of community property rights and laws, nor can they look to “traditional values” to help them negotiate and make decisions on pooling of resources. In point of fact, pooling resources could have devastating

consequences for the partners in long term lesbian sexually based relationships. For example, death of one partner does not automatically entitle the other partner to resources that have been pooled. Many lesbian couples have had to resort to creative and innovative means to insure the financial protection of their respective partners (Sherman, 1992).

Nonetheless, Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) found that pooling financial resources is an option for lesbian dyads, but the decision to pool finances is dependent upon the length of the relationship. That is, the longer the relationship the more likely the couple is to pool financial resources.

The second area of interest under the rubric of finances is how lesbian couples negotiate the matter of paying bills. Do they share the common bills (e.g., rent/mortgage, utilities, and the like) equally? Or does the partner who earns more pay a greater share of the bills? The literature on this topic is nonexistent, so this area of study is completely exploratory.

The first task is to determine whether or not the issue of finances in general presents an area of conflict among the participants. Analysis of the open-ended questions as well as the unstructured interviews indicate that finances is not a conflict item. Three open ended questions were asked to determine possible areas of conflict within the relationship:

1. What has been the most difficult problem with your partner that you have had to overcome?
2. What frustrates you the most about your partner?
3. The one thing that I would change about my partner if I could is . . .

Only one participant out of the 168 used in this study responded with an association to finance, and her occupation was most likely a factor in her response. A 39-year-old financial analyst said about her 36-year-old partner who is a real estate associate.

Her messiness with papers all over and her lack of attention toward completing very important thing that she'd rather I do for her (taxes, bills, etc.) drives me to distraction.

The qualitative analysis allows us to assume that issues of finances are not a major factor in the area of conflict. If this is so, the next question is how have the couples negotiated a plan that allows freedom of conflict over finances? Conflict over finances could be a major factor in movement from the maintenance/change phase to dissolution. Therefore, any negotiation and compromise that negates conflict over finances is important in the process of the maintenance of the relationship. First we look at frequency of pooled resources. This was measured by three questions:

1. Do you have a joint checking account?
2. Do you have a joint savings account?
3. Do you have any joint investments where both names appear on the papers of ownership?

The findings (shown in Table 9.1) show that in the majority of cases, the couples do not pool their economic resources. However, while a minority, there are large numbers of women who do pool their resources.

The next task is to determine what independent variables might be related to pooling economic resources. The crosstab procedure is used to test the hypotheses in this section so that the gamma statistic can be obtained. The gamma statistic is an association measurement statistic that can be used with nominal and ordinal variables (Agresti and Finlay, 1986)

Table 9.1: Frequency Distributions (n=84 couples)

VARIABLE	RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Joint Checking	Yes	33	39%
	No	48	57%
	Missing	3	4%
Joint Savings	Yes	27	32%
	No	53	63%
	Missing	4	5%
Joint Investments	Yes	30	36%
	No	49	58%
	Missing	5	6%

The first hypothesis to be tested is 3A--pooling of economic resources is predicted by length of relationship. The economic resource variables that make up the dependent variables in this hypothesis are (a) joint checking (b) joint savings and (c) joint investments. The responses are coded to reflect 0 = no and 1 = yes. The length of relationship variable is coded 0 = low (less than 1 year to 2 years), 1 = medium (3 years to 5 years), and 2 = high (over 5 years).

Hypothesis 3A is supported as displayed in Table 9.2. The findings are quite similar to those of Blumstein and Schwartz (1983). There is a moderate positive relationship between partners having a joint savings account and length of cohabitation suggesting that the longer the partners live together, the likelihood of pooling savings increases. There is a moderate positive relationship between ownership of joint

Table 9 2: Gamma Statistic Measuring Relationship Between Economic Resources and Length of Cohabitation

	Joint Checking n=138	Joint Savings n=136	Joint Investment n=136
Cohabitation	.5101	.3528	.5240

(joint checking, joint savings, and joint investments are coded 0=No; 1=Yes)  
(length of cohabitation is coded 0=Low; 1=Medium, 2=High)

Note. Analysis was done on an individual level rather than a partner level for this table as individuals make the decision to maintain an individual checking/savings account as opposed to joint checking/savings account.

investments and length of cohabitation suggesting that the longer the partners cohabit the likelihood of purchasing joint investments increases. Finally, there is a moderate positive relationship between pooling economic resources in the form of a joint checking account and length of cohabitation. The longer the partners cohabit, the more likely it is that they will open a joint checking account and savings account.

While the above-referenced findings show us that some of the women in this study pool their financial resources while others do not, this does not suggest ways in which the women have negotiated financial details in such a manner as to render them a negligible factor in regard to conflict. Upon further investigation, however, the data show that the women have negotiated a workable solution regarding payment of specific bills which could account for the lack of conflict surrounding financial matters. Four questions were asked with regard to specific financial obligations:

1. How is your rent/mortgage paid?
2. How are your utilities paid?

- 3 Who pays for the groceries?
- 4 Who pays for entertainment outside the home (like dinner at a restaurant)?<sup>1</sup>

The responses for all four questions were the same:

1. I pay all.
2. I pay most.
3. Equally shared.
4. My partner pays most.
5. My partner pays all.

Table 9.3 displays the frequency chart. As the majority of the participants advised that the four specific bills are equally shared, the frequencies were run simply on an individual level rather than a dyadic level. Findings show that 61% equally share the grocery bill; 61% equally share the entertainment expenses outside the home, 52% equally share the rent/mortgage payment, and 55% equally share the utility bills. The other responses exhibited no skewness in either direction. Rather, the other responses are approximately evenly distributed. While these findings are not generalizable, the data suggest that financial matters are not a source of conflict within the sexually based primary relationship, since by equally sharing many of the bills, money as a source of conflict is rendered moot.

Once again, the partners in the dyads under study have negotiated and compromised in such a manner as to mitigate the potentially damaging effects of financial matters to the partnership. As shown, regardless of economic resources, the partners share their mutual bills equally. Further, they realize that pooling of resources could be a

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<sup>1</sup> Attempts were made to create a scale entitled "Finances," however, the Alpha levels were not sufficient to allow a scale to be created. The highest Alpha achieved in scaling attempts was .56.



particularly strong source of friction, so on the average, the couples in this study refrain from pooling resources until their relationship has been maintained for several years.

Table 9.3: Frequency Distribution of Financial Management (n=168)

	<u>I Pay</u> <u>All/Most</u>		<u>Equally</u> <u>Shared</u>		<u>Partner Pays</u> <u>All/Most</u>		<u>Missing</u>	
	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>%</u>
Rent/Mortgage	32	19%	88	52%	28	17%	20	12%
Utilities	36	21%	93	55%	23	14%	16	10%
Groceries	30	18%	103	61%	22	13%	13	8%
Entertainment	37	22%	102	61%	28	17%	1	1%

Note: Analysis was done on an individual basis as the questions were constructed for analysis on an individual level.

## CHAPTER TEN MAINTENANCE/CHANGE PHASE III DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence effects a drastic change in a relationship. There are two choices for partners who are victims of domestic violence. First, they can move onto the dissolution phase. Second, they can negotiate and compromise in such a manner as to mitigate the perception of domestic violence so that the relationship can be maintained. As limitations of the data do not allow us to examine those who have chosen the dissolution phase, we will examine the compromises and negotiations that partners make in order to maintain a sexually based primary relationship in which domestic violence occurs.

### Prevalence

Measuring the prevalence of domestic violence is a daunting task under the best of circumstances. Even with the use of a known population, random sampling, and measures that have been tested for reliability and validity, the numbers used to detail prevalence by social scientists are at best educated guesses. Further, these estimates are generally confined to the married heterosexual population and are generated through the use of clinical samples, statistics kept by battered women's shelters, police reports, or social surveys. The possibility of under-reporting of domestic violence incidence is very real for several reasons. First, clinical samples, police data, and data gathered by battered women's shelters by definition contain the experiences of only those who seek help.

Second, as most domestic violence occurs in the confines of the home, the issue of privacy and the couple's right to privacy concerning personal matters impacts upon research into this area (Straus, 1990a; 1990b; 1991).

Attempts to explore the incidence of partner violence among lesbian couples are certainly plagued by some of the same problems as defined above. However, there are additional problems that researchers face when examining domestic violence among lesbian dyads. First, there is no defined population, so random samples are impossible to obtain. Second, data gathered through battered women's shelters and police reports are generally not available as these venues are not as accessible to lesbian victims of partner violence. Third, many lesbian women are still closeted and as such are reluctant to report incidents of battering by their partners on the chance that their sexual orientation will become an issue (Hart, 1986; Schilit and Lie, 1990; Woodman, 1982).

Prevalence of partner violence among lesbian dyads has been a topic of interest among researchers recently. For example, Coleman (1990) found that among the 90 participants in her study, 47% had displayed physical violence at least one time in their relationship. This compares to Loulan's (1987) study of 1566 lesbian women in which 17% self-reported acts of physical violence against their partners. In both studies the primary goal was to determine incidence of differing types of abuse: emotional, verbal, sexual, and physical. Further, both studies gathered information only from self-reported victims of partner battering. No data were gathered from alleged perpetrators.

In contrast, the design of this study was such that data was gathered from both the victim and the perpetrator of physical violence. The first task was to determine whether frequencies of victimization matched frequencies of reports of physical violence by the

batterer. Both partners completed two sets of violence scales that were modeled after Straus's (1979) Conflict Tactics Scale. The Conflict Tactics Scale was modified to reflect (a) "what you have done when you had a disagreement with your partner" and (b) "what your partner did to you when there was a disagreement." Self-reporting from victim and perpetrator was considered an important aspect of this part of the study so that there could be some semblance of checks and balances on the reliability of self-reporting. You will recall from Chapter Four that the partners were physically separated from each other during the administration of the survey and that they were asked to refrain from any conversation. This was done to insure that there was no cross-contamination of the responses. Table 10.1 displays responses from both partners on physical violence issues, and the percentages of responses are remarkably similar suggesting that the responses are reliable. The participants were first asked whether or not they

1. Threw something at my partner
2. Pushed, grabbed, or shoved my partner
3. Hit (or tried to hit) my partner with my hands
4. Hit (or tried to hit) my partner with anything other than my hands

The participants were then asked whether or not their partner

1. Threw something at me
2. Pushed, grabbed, or shoved me
3. Hit (or tried to hit) me with her hands
4. Hit (or tried to hit) me with something other than her hands

The responses for all questions were

- 0 Never
- 1 Once during the past year
- 2 Two or three times during the past year
- 3 Often, but less than once a month during the past year
- 4 About once a month during the past year
- 5 More than once a month during the past year

Table 10.1 displays the frequencies of each type of physical abuse, both from the self-reported victim and the self-reported perpetrator. Further analysis of the data shows that of the women who did report using physical violence, their respective partners reported being victims of physical violence (recall from Chapter 4 that the surveys were coded so that specific partners could be identified). This finding is very important as it speaks to the issue of self-reporting. While not generalizable, the partners of self-reported perpetrators in this sample identified themselves as self-reported victims of battering. While researchers have suggested that self-reporting may not be a reliable tool for determining prevalence of domestic violence (Straus, 1990a; 1990b; 1991), the findings in this study suggest otherwise.

In order to perform statistical analysis of the commission of physical violence, a scale was created combining the above referenced questions. Frequencies were run on these scales and they are displayed in Table 10.2. These frequency charts provide a better understanding of prevalence of violence among the partners in this sample in that the scores from 1 through 20 reflect multiple acts across the different types of violence. Once again, however, it is important to note the similarities in reporting between self-reported victims and self-reported perpetrators.

#### Correlates of Physical Violence

Renzetti (1992) took a different approach to the issue of partner violence in lesbian dyads. The sample for her study consisted of participants who were all victims of domestic violence. Renzetti was unconcerned with prevalence of partner violence, but was concerned with correlates of partner violence among lesbian dyads. It should be noted that although her sample did not include those who self-identified as batterers,

Table 10.1. Frequencies of Incidents of Physical Abuse (n=168)

QUESTION	RESPONSE	PERPETRATOR		VICTIM	
Threw something at partner or had something thrown at me	0	142	85%	142	85%
	1	11	6%	10	6%
	2	2	1%	2	1%
	3	3	2%	4	2%
	4	2	1%	2	1%
	Missing	8	5%	8	5%
Pushed partner or was pushed by partner	0	122	73%	126	75%
	1	23	14%	19	11%
	2	8	5%	6	4%
	3	3	2%	3	2%
	4	5	2%	6	4%
	Missing	7	4%	8	4%
Hit partner with hands or was hit by partner's hands	0	139	83%	137	82%
	1	14	8%	11	7%
	2	3	2%	3	2%
	3	3	2%	3	2%
	4	2	1%	6	3%
	Missing	7	4%	8	4%
Hit partner with something other than hands or was hit with something other than hands	0	149	89%	149	89%
	1	6	4%	3	2%
	2	2	1%	2	1%
	3	2	1%	2	1%
	4	2	1%	5	3%
	Missing	7	4%	7	4%

(0=No; 1=Once that year; 2=2/3 times that year; 3=often, less than once a month, 4=about once a month; 5=more than once a month)

Table 10.2: Frequencies of Scaled Responses from Perpetrators and Victims (n=168)

Value	Perpetrator Response		Victim Response	
	n	%	n	%
0	117	69.5%	120	71.3%
1	13	7.7%	13	7.7%
2	10	6.0%	9	5.4%
3	6	3.6%	5	3.0%
4	6	3.6%	2	1.2%
5			1	.6%
6	1	.6%	1	.6%
7	2	1.2%		
8			1	.6%
10			1	.6%
11	1	.6%	1	.6%
12	1	.6%	1	.6%
13			2	1.2%
14	2	1.2%		
16			3	1.8%
18	1	.6%		
Missing	8	4.8%	8	4.8%

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(0=No Violence Committed or Received; 1 through 18=increased acts of violence committed or received)

implications for hypotheses about self-reported batterers are drawn and used in this section of analysis. There were three major findings in Renzetti's study. First, as the victim's independence and autonomy increased, the frequency of physical violence against them increased. Second, jealousy was not a determinant of physical violence, but was rather a correlate of emotional abuse. Third, attempts to correlate economic dependency with frequency of physical violence were contradictory. For example, both economic dependence on the part of the victim as well as the victim's economic independence were negatively associated with physical abuse. Finally, substance abuse by the batterer (as reported by the victim) was highly correlated with incidence of physical abuse. While the most comprehensive study to date on physical violence between lesbian partners, it must be noted that Renzetti's sample consisted solely of the victim of the violence. There was no data gathered from alleged batterers or nonvictims as a point of comparison. In contrast, this study seeks to discern two separate sets of determinants: first, the correlates between women who commit acts of violence against their partners, and second, correlates between women who are victims of acts of violence by their partners.

### Self-Reported Batterers

#### Hypotheses

Several variables were considered in the analysis of determinants of self-reported acts of physical violence against a partner. Among heterosexual couples, there have been conflicting findings concerning the role of gender in domestic violence. While some studies revealed that gender is indeed a factor, with males committing most of the acts of violence (Gelles and Conte, 1990a; Straus, 1990a), other studies found that female partners in heterosexual dyads committed acts of physical violence against their male



partners in equal numbers (Johnson, 1995; McNeely and Robinson-Simpson, 1987; Pence and Paymar, 1993; Straus and Gelles, 1990; Straus, 1990b). The issue of gender must be confronted in this study. While we know that lesbian women self-identify as “butch” and “femme” in large numbers, we also know that, contrary to popular belief, these terms do not conform easily to “male” and “female” (Weber, 1996). Thus, Hypothesis 4A is gender identity (i.e., butch vs. femme) is not associated with commission of physical violence.

Second, age is expected to impact the commission of physical violence. We expect that there is a negative relationship between age of the participant and reported acts of physical violence--that is, as a woman ages she is less likely to commit acts of physical violence against her partner (Hypothesis 4B).

Recall that the women in this sample perceived equity in financial matters and in the distribution of household labor. Further, qualitative data from the participants suggest that finances and allocation of household labor are not issues of conflict within their relationships. Thus, it is reasoned that the commission of physical violence against a partner is not related to financial inequities (Hypothesis 4C). Financial inequity is measured by income.

The next hypothesis is more complicated than the previous three. The purpose is to gain a profile of the self-reported batterer. We know from the literature on heterosexual dyadic violence that physical abuse is about the batterer gaining power and control (Gelles and Conte, 1990a; Gelles and Cornell, 1990b; Island and Letellier, 1991; Straus, 1990a; Straus, 1990b; Straus, 1991; Straus and Gelles, 1990; Walker, 1979; Walker, 1989). The dilemma is that this same literature typically personifies the batterer as male. While there is a small body of literature that discusses lesbian dyadic domestic

violence (Asherah, 1990; Coleman, 1990; Elliot, 1990; Renzetti, 1992), none have confronted the issue of the female batterer within these dyads. Thus, in order to profile a batterer within a lesbian dyad, it is necessary to extrapolate from the literature regarding male batterers in heterosexual dyads.

To complicate matters, the determinants of physical violence tendencies among male batterers appear to belong to two separate spheres: First, there are demographic variables as outlined in hypotheses 4A through 4C, but there are also social-psychological variables. These two types of variables seem to work in conjunction to form a predictable profile of a male batterer. I would suggest that the quest for power and control, as demonstrated by the two types of variables identified above, is not a gendered monopoly. We know that among heterosexual couples women have been found to be batterers, although the reasons for women becoming abusers have been debated at length (Dobash and Dobash, 1992; McNeely and Robinson-Simpson, 1987; Strauss and Gelles, 1990).

Synthesizing existing literature on male domestic batterers provides us with several indicators of a propensity toward physical abuse with regard to social-psychological variables (Davidson and NiCarthy, 1989; Fedders, 1988; Ferrato, 1989; Forward, 1986; Forward, 1986; Jones and Schechter, 1992; Ptacek, 1988; Walker, 1979; Walker, 1989). These indicators can be categorized as pressure tactics and abuse of trust as follows.

1. **Pressure Tactics:** This variable can be explained by forcing the victim of the violence to feel guilt or to evoke sympathy for the batterer. In the analysis, pressure tactics is measured by the following questions:

- a. I apologize first after my partner and I have had a disagreement.
- b. Even when I know that something is not my fault, in order to keep from arguing I say that it is my fault.

Responses are 0 = Always, 1 = Most of the time, 2 = Hardly ever, and 3 = Never.

2. Abusing Trust: This variable can take the form of lying, jealousy, or withholding information. This variable is measured by the following questions:

- a. I lie to my partner.
- b. I am jealous of my partner's interests outside of our relationship.
- c. I have to hide my feelings from my partner.

Responses to these questions are 0 = Always, 1 = Most of the time, 2 = Hardly ever, and 3 = Never.

The above questions were used to create an additive index called "quality of relationship." The index uses responses that we reasoned would suggest poor quality. Responses of Always and Most of the time were used for the questions "Even when I know that something is my fault, in order to keep from arguing I say that it is my fault" and "I apologize first after my partner and I have had a disagreement." Responses of Hardly Ever and Never were used for the questions "I am jealous of my partner's interests outside of our relationship" and "I have to hide my feelings from my partner." Hypothesis 4D is quality of relationship is related to the commission of physical violence.

### Analysis

OLS regression was used to test the hypotheses. However, before regression could be used, transformation of the dependent variable had to be accomplished. Recall

that the dependent variable was a scale of four questions on the Conflict Tactics Scale: (a) I threw something at my partner; (b) I pushed, grabbed, or shoved my partner; (c) I hit or tried to hit my partner with my hands; and (d) I hit or tried to hit my partner with something other than my hands. The dependent variable was renamed Violence. It should be noted that in order to test Hypothesis 4A regarding gender identity, the variable was re-coded using dummy variables (0=Non-butch; 1=Butch)

### Findings

Results of the OLS regression can be found in Table 10.3. Analysis reveals that the model explains 13% of the variance. Recall that Hypothesis 4A is gender identity is not associated with commission of physical violence. This hypothesis is supported. The relationship between gender identity and the commission of domestic violence is a very weak negative relationship.

Table 10 3: OLS Regression of Self-Reported Perpetrator and Other Variables (n=158)

<u>OLS Regression Coefficients</u>			
<u>Independent Variables</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>SE B</u>	<u>Beta</u>
Income	-.0140	.0109	-.1010
Gender Identity (0=Non-Butch; 1=Butch)	-8.1336	.0189	-.0032
Quality of Relationship	-.1971.	.0644	-.2363
Age	-.0326	.0089	-.2876

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$r^2 = .13$

F = 5.861

(0=No violence; 1=once that year; 2=2/3 times that year; 3=Often, less than once a month; 4>About once a month; 5=More than once a month)

Recall that Hypothesis 4B is as a woman ages, she is less likely to commit acts of physical violence against her partner. This hypothesis is supported. Age is negatively associated with the commission of physical violence suggesting that in this sample, as age increases the commission of physical violence is less likely.

Hypothesis 4C is the commission of physical violence against a partner is not related to financial inequities as measured by income. This hypothesis is supported. Income has a very weak negative relationship to the dependent variable suggesting that it plays no role in attempts to profile a perpetrator.

Hypothesis 4D is poor quality of relationship is related to frequency of domestic violence on the part of the perpetrator. This hypothesis is supported. There is a negative relationship between quality of relationship and commission of physical violence indicating that among perpetrators poor quality of relationship is correlated with frequency of commission of domestic violence.

#### Self-Reported Victims of Physical Violence

Before hypotheses and multivariate analysis are presented, descriptive data regarding those who self-report as victims of physical violence are in order. Of the self-reported victims of domestic violence, 20% received medical attention as a result of injuries inflicted upon them by their partners; 20% called the police as a result of injuries inflicted upon them by their partners; and 30% have lied to others about the cause of bruises that they received as a result of physical abuse by their partners. When asked the question "My partner is more physically abusive toward me when she," the variance of responses was minimal. Fifty-four percent of the victims answered "partner has been drinking"; 36% answered "partner is suffering from pre-menstrual syndrome (PMS), 5%

answered “partner has been doing drugs”; and 5% failed to respond to the question. The overwhelming majority of responses indicate that substance abuse, alcohol in particular, is seen by the victims as the most influential factor in their partners’ tendencies toward physical violence. This finding is consistent with research on domestic violence, both within heterosexual and homosexual dyads (Coleman, 1990; Gelles and Cornell, 1990b; Kaufman-Kantor, and Straus, 1987; Renzetti, 1992).

Just as the previous section sought to profile batterers within lesbian dyads, the task in this section is to profile the self-reported victims of partner violence. The literature that exists on battered women serves as a starting point, albeit one that is skewed toward heterosexual women who are abused by their heterosexual male partners (Davidson and NiCarthy, 1989; Fedders, 1988; Ferrato, 1989; Forward, 1986; Jones and Schechter, 1992; Walker, 1979; Walker, 1989). Once again, characteristics must be extrapolated from the heterosexual battered woman in order to better fit the lesbian victim. Limitations of the data do not allow for analysis of all characteristics ascribed to battered women, however, this section will deal with as many as the data allow.

### Hypotheses

A synthesis of the literature on battered women suggests that a common characteristic is denial or minimization of the abuse (Davidson and Nicarthy, 1989; Fedders, 1988; Ferrato, 1989; Forward, 1986; Jones and Schechter, 1992; Maracek, 1993; Walker, 1979; Walker, 1989). This characteristic is exemplified by either complete denial of physical abuse or by the position that “it really wasn’t that bad.” This characteristic is one that is arguably just as valid among homosexual victims of abuse as it is among heterosexual victims of abuse. Therefore, Hypothesis 5A is among those who self-report

as victims of partner physical abuse, there is a tendency to deny that the abuse exists.

Qualitative data is used to test this hypothesis and the following open-ended questions are the measures

1. My partner cannot control her physically abusive tendencies toward me because . . .

2. My partner does physically abuse me. The reason that I do not end the relationship is . . .

A second characteristic of battered women is codependency (Davidson and NicCarthy, 1989; Fedders, 1988; Ferrato, 1989; Forward, 1986; Jones and Schechter, 1992, Maracek, 1993, Walker, 1979; Walker, 1989). This characteristic is exemplified by the victims' excusing the batterers actions as beyond the control of the batterer. In addition, the victims believe that they can help cure the problems that cause the batterer to batter. This characteristic is also one that can arguably be applied to homosexual victims of abuse. Thus, Hypothesis 5B is women who self-report as victims of partner violence are more inclined to (a) excuse their partner's behavior due to influences beyond the control of the batterer and (b) believe that they (the victims) can help the batterers end the cycle of violence. This hypothesis is tested with qualitative measures and the open-ended questions used for the analysis are

1. My partner cannot control her physically abusive tendencies toward me because . . .

2. The one thing that I would change about my partner if I could is . . .

## Findings

Hypothesis 5A is among those who self-report as victims of partner abuse, there is a tendency to deny that the abuse exists. It appears that the qualitative data support this hypothesis. Of those who self-reported as victims, 71% report that their partners are either (a) not physically abusive or (b) the violence "isn't that bad" even though their responses on the Conflict Tactic Scale provide evidence to the contrary. A 29-year-old title-searcher reports that within the last year, at a rate of about once a month for each item her partner has thrown something at her; pushed, grabbed, or shoved her; hit her with hands; and hit her with something other than hands. Yet, in answer to the question "My partner does physically abuse me. The reason that I do not end the relationship is" she responds "My partner is not physically abusive." Similarly, a 31-year-old accountant reported incidents of physical abuse at her partners hands ranging from often to about once a month. This same woman has lied to others about the cause of bruises that she received from the physical abuse of her partner. Yet, in answer to the question "My partner does physically abuse me. The reason that I do not end the relationship is" she responds, "It's not that bad. No one ever gets really hurt." A 40-year-old insurance representative reports that she is physically abused by her partner on an average of once a month. Yet when asked why she does not end the relationship she replies, "She doesn't really abuse. She just has a very short temper." A 29-year-old sales representative reports that she is physically abused by her partner often, but less than once a month. She has also called the police as a result of a beating and has sought medical treatment for injuries sustained as a result of a beating. However, to both questions measuring the victim's acknowledgment of the violence she answers, "My partner is not physically abusive." A



24-year-old social worker reports that she is a victim of partner violence about once a month. Yet, in answering both open-ended questions on domestic violence she writes, "Really, she's not physically abusive. The few times she hit me, it wasn't that big a deal." This data suggests that lesbian victims of partner violence are just as likely to adopt the characteristic of denial or minimization of violence as are their heterosexual counterparts.

Hypothesis 5B deals with the issue of codependency. It is posited that victims of partner violence are more inclined to (a) excuse their partner's behavior due to influences beyond the control of the batterer and (b) believe that they (the victims) can help the batterers end the cycle of violence. Qualitative data lends support for this hypothesis. A 34-year-old accountant reports extreme violence perpetrated on her by her partner. This violence occurs once a month. The victim called the police because of the violence three times during the year, has sought medical attention as a result of the violence on numerous occasions, and consistently lies to people about the causes of the bruises resulting from partner violence. Yet her response to the question "My partner cannot control her physically abusive tendencies toward me because" is "She battles major depression and she really cannot help herself." The accountant further advises that she does not end the relationship because "we are joined in Holy Union. I made a vow to support her through her illness and it is my responsibility to live up to that vow. I am the only person that she trusts and the only person who can help her through this depression." Similarly, a 21-year-old homemaker reports high rates of severe physical violence, occurring once a month. She has called the police 5 times within the past year, has received medical attention twice, and has lied to others about the cause of bruises that she received from partner abuse. Yet she displays two characteristics that are found among heterosexual

battered women--codependency and the tendency to blame herself. She reports that her partner cannot control her physically abusive tendencies because "I become too much for her. I just won't leave her alone. I push and push until she gets upset." She also reports that she will not end the relationship because "right now I know that she's under a lot of stress and I'm the only one who can help her with that stress. I know how to make her relax and that's what she needs." A 44-year-old registered nurse reports that she is a victim of partner violence often, but less than once a month. She excuses her partner's violence by attributing it to "hormones--she has raging hormones during PMS periods. She just cannot help what her body makes her do, and as a nurse I realize that." A 47-year-old office manager reports that she is a victim of partner violence once a month. This woman consistently lies to others regarding the bruises received from her partner's beatings. Yet she excuses her partner's behavior, "Look, that's the way she was raised. She doesn't know any better. She needs someone to take care of her and I do that." Her response to why she does not end the relationship is, "I don't like to hurt anyone."

### Discussion

The findings in this chapter are significant in that this is the first study that deals with partner information regarding domestic violence within lesbian sexually based primary relationships. As discussed previously, the few studies that were done gathered data only from the battered partner.

However, the importance of these findings with regard to this study lie in the process of the relationship. That is, thus far the self-reported victims of domestic violence have negotiated and compromised in such a way as to diminish or ignore the realities of violence. This is part of the process described by Scanzoni et al. (1989) that is

characteristic of the maintenance/change phase of relationships. It is entirely possible that at some point the victims of violence who participated in this study will move from maintenance/change to dissolution of the relationship, but the data used in this study cannot predict such change. It is significant to note that by moving to a higher order theoretical construct (sexually based primary relationship) we can see the similarities of the process of various dyadic groups. Recall that studies on heterosexual battered women revealed findings quite similar to those found within this study. Thus, by concentrating on the process rather than the functions, the differences among various dyadic/familial relationships are blurred.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN CONCLUSION

In American society today, the term “family” is perceived as the nuclear or benchmark family that consists of a heterosexual male and a heterosexual female who are legally married and who will procreate. In sociology, scholars have adopted this term and held it to be the standard by which all other family forms are judged, even though the nuclear family is now a minority in this post-industrial society (Rubin, 1995; Scanzoni et al., 1989; Scanzoni, 1995). As a result of this sociological paradox, terms such as “alternative lifestyles” have come to represent the majority of sexually based primary relationships. Individuals are re-creating and re-inventing dyadic/familial forms in order to make their lives better. They are seeking havens within which they can gain a sense of “we-ness” in a world that is increasingly more impersonal. Yet, as a result of their action, they are relegated to a status in family studies that suggests that their recreations are somehow “less than” the ideal “family” (Scanzoni et al., 1989).

In order to find a niche for “alternative lifestyles” within the realm of family studies, the constructed gap between “alternative lifestyles” as a lesser form of affiliation and “family” as the ideal form must be bridged. One way to bridge this gap is to expand the “family” paradigm into what Mahoney (1986) calls the “concept of family.” In reconfiguring the “concept of family,” our angle of vision on what makes up the basic components of “family” must be adjusted.

Recall that heretofore the basic components of “family” have been (1) the characteristics of the actors within the relationship (i.e., a heterosexual female and a heterosexual male); (2) the form of the relationship (i.e., legally married); and (3) the function of the relationship (i.e., procreation, socialization of progeny, sexual regulation, and gendered economic interdependence). In the postindustrial society of today, however, these components relegate the majority of dyadic/familial re-creations into “alternative lifestyle” status. Thus, “family” has become an exclusive theoretical construct rather than an inclusive one.

By moving to a higher level theoretical construct (i.e., sexually based primary relationship), a more inclusive model is allowed. This model looks neither at the characteristics of the actors, the restrictive form, nor the functions. Rather, this model looks to the process of the relationship. In essence, this theoretical model allows the individual actions of the actors to recreate and reinvent the “concept of families” in such a way as to make their lives better. People who pair in sexually based primary relationships have a common goal: the search for “we-ness.” In constructing relationships wherein this “we-ness” can be achieved, the *process* of the relationship becomes key. Scanzoni et al. (1989) constructed a model that looks to this process as the great equalizer of old and new concepts of family. The fluidity of the relationship and the phases of the relationship through which the actors move are patterns universal to all constructs of “family.” This universality allows the distinctions between the various family forms to blur, and provides equal status to all forms. This dissertation has used the model of Scanzoni et al. (1989) as a sensitizing rubric for understanding some of the ways lesbian couples display characteristics and problems typical of any family.

We have seen that the couples in this study have gone through the formation stage as defined by Scanzoni et al. (1989). Shared behavior patterns and participation in choice and control were major components of the formation phase as described by these couples. Throughout the formation phase the couples negotiated and compromised so that their “me-ness” could be satisfied. Once their aspirations were realized regarding “what can she do for me,” the couples in this study were ready to move on to commitment which exemplified the move from “me” to “we.”

The act of commitment segued the couples into the maintenance/change phase wherein negotiations and compromises are part of everyday life. Universally, partners move, negotiate, argue, and compromise on a daily basis about issues that affect their relationships. The women in this study were no different. Part of the compromise and negotiation can be seen in the findings regarding allocation of domestic tasks. Rather than risk harming the relationship over who performs what tasks, the women in this study negotiate *perception* of reality. That is, although the data shows that there is no equality in allocation of household tasks, the participants perceive equality. They have negotiated a compromise, even if it means constructing a reality, for the good of their relationship.

The findings with regard to domestic violence mirror this negotiation of reality versus perception of reality. In order to maintain the relationship, even in the face of change (domestic violence), the victims tend to construct a reality that suggests the violence is nonexistent. As stated previously, it is highly likely that the change from a nonviolent relationship to a violent relationship will result in a dissolution phase among some of the participants. This speaks to the universality of the nonlinear process of

relationships that is inherent in the theoretical model of sexually based primary relationships.

As described above, one of the contributions of this study is that it lends credence to the theoretical construct of sexually based primary relationship as outlined by Scanzoni et al. (1989). Optimally, any couple (regardless of characteristics) which has an emotional bond and practice restricted exchange within the sexual realm, can be plugged into the universal model and the process of their relationship would be the same.

This study, however, makes other contributions to the sociological body of literature. This is the first study that deals with both partners in a female same-sex dyad in detail. In addition, this study framed the research within the experience and shared meanings of the lesbian sub-culture. In so doing, we were able to see while gender identities (i.e., butch and femme) are prevalent among lesbian women, the variable "gender" is not associated with issues such as allocation of household tasks, financial control, and physical violence. This is a dramatic departure from long held stereotypical notions that occasionally found their way into the literature on same-sex couples.

The findings with regard to domestic violence provides insight into the psyche of the batterers. The findings that batterers tend to abuse authority, abuse trust, and blame their partners for their lack of self esteem speak to universal issues regarding domestic violence. As gender is taken out of the equation in female same-sex couples, the findings may make a contribution in future studies of physical violence, regardless of the gender of the perpetrator.

Finally, we are privy to the perceptions of the women in this study regarding their dyadic/familial relationships. These women are adamant that they have created families,

not "alternative lifestyles." This is significant in that, even in the face of ostracism by society and biological kin, these women are fiercely protective of the havens of we-ness which they have created--their families



APPENDIX  
QUESTIONNAIRE

FIRST, WE WOULD LIKE TO ASK YOU SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT YOURSELF.  
PLEASE CHECK THE ONE ANSWER THAT DESCRIBES YOU BEST.

1. I belong to, and regularly attend the meetings of groups that are political or professional in nature.  
  
☐ Yes  
☐ No
  
2. I have "come out" to my family.  
  
☐ Yes \*\*If "yes," please answer #3  
☐ No
  
3. When I came out to them, my family  
  
☐ Accepted and supported my lifestyle  
☐ Rejected my lifestyle, but supported me as a member of the family  
☐ Rejected both my lifestyle and me as a member of the family  
☐ Accepted me as a member of the family, but continue to act as if I am straight  
☐ Other: Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
4. I have "come out" to my coworkers.  
  
☐ Yes \*\*If "yes," please answer #5  
☐ No
  
5. If you answered Yes to #4, please tell us whether you have been a victim of any of the following due to your sexual orientation. Please check all that apply.  
  
☐ Verbal harassment or abuse  
☐ Physical abuse  
☐ Passed over for promotion  
☐ Demoted  
☐ Fired or discharged  
☐ Other: Please specify \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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PLEASE CHECK THE ONE ANSWER THAT DESCRIBES YOU BEST.

1. I belong to, and regularly attend the meetings of groups that are political or professional in nature.  
  
☐ Yes  
☐ No
  
2. I have "come out" to my family.  
  
☐ Yes \*\*If "yes", please answer #3  
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3. When I came out to them, my family  
  
☐ Accepted and supported my lifestyle  
☐ Rejected my lifestyle, but supported me as a member of the family  
☐ Rejected both my lifestyle and me as a member of the family  
☐ Accepted me as a member of the family, but continue to act as if I am straight  
☐ Other: Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
4. I have "come out" to my co-workers.  
  
☐ Yes \*\*If "yes", please answer #5  
☐ No
  
5. If you answered Yes to #4, please tell us whether you have been a victim of any of the following due to your sexual orientation. Please check all that apply  
  
☐ Verbal harassment or abuse  
☐ Physical abuse  
☐ Passed over for promotion  
☐ Demoted  
☐ Fired or discharged  
☐ Other: Please specify \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. When I am around straight people, I worry about whether they will think I am gay.
- ☐ Always
  - ☐ Most of the time
  - ☐ Hardly ever
  - ☐ Never
7. I like being a gay woman
- ☐ Always
  - ☐ Most of the time
  - ☐ Hardly ever
  - ☐ Never
8. My family and I argue about the fact that I am gay.
- ☐ Always
  - ☐ Most of the time
  - ☐ Hardly ever
  - ☐ Never
9. I wish that I could be straight rather than gay.
- ☐ Always
  - ☐ Most of the time
  - ☐ Hardly ever
  - ☐ Never
10. I consider myself to be a feminist.
- ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No
11. In my work situation, I work with
- ☐ Mostly straight people
  - ☐ About half straight and half gay people
  - ☐ Mostly gay people
  - ☐ All gay people
  - ☐ All straight people
12. Between the ages of 4 and 18, I was raised in a home that was
- ☐ Completely heterosexual
  - ☐ Completely homosexual
  - ☐ 1 parent was heterosexual, 1 parent was homosexual

13. I first realized that I was gay at the age of \_\_\_\_\_

14. Between the ages of 4 and 18, I was raised by

- ☐ A single parent
- ☐ Both biological parents
- ☐ 1 biological parent, 1 step-parent
- ☐ Adoptive parents
- ☐ Foster home
- ☐ Other relatives
- ☐ A combination of the above (please tell us which)

- ☐ Other: Please specify \_\_\_\_\_

15. How many cohabiting relationships have you had with women that have lasted longer than 3 years?

\_\_\_\_\_

16. How would you describe yourself based on your sexual history

- ☐ Entirely homosexual
- ☐ Mostly homosexual but with some heterosexual history
- ☐ Equally homosexual and heterosexual
- ☐ Mostly heterosexual but with some homosexual history
- ☐ Entirely heterosexual

17. Do you think that any other members of your family (to include aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.) are gay?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

18. Of those family members who you suspect are gay, which side of the family are they on?

- ☐ Mother's side
- ☐ Father's side
- ☐ Both

19. Do you know for certain that any other members of your family are gay?
- ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No
20. Of those family members who you know are gay, which side of the family are they on?
- ☐ Mother's side
  - ☐ Father's side
  - ☐ Both
21. What is your current marital status (regarding heterosexual relationships)?
- ☐ Never married
  - ☐ Currently married
  - ☐ Separated
  - ☐ Divorced
  - ☐ Widowed
22. What is your current marital status (regarding homosexual relationships)?
- ☐ Single - not currently involved
  - ☐ Partner in a Holy Union
  - ☐ Cohabiting with partner
  - ☐ Separated from partner
  - ☐ In a long term relationship, but not living together
  - ☐ Widowed
23. If you are presently living with a partner, how long have you been cohabiting?
- ☐ Less than 1 year
  - ☐ 1 year
  - ☐ 2 years
  - ☐ 3 years
  - ☐ 4 years
  - ☐ 5 years
  - ☐ Over 5 years
24. Do you consider yourself
- ☐ Butch
  - ☐ Femme

25. What is the highest education that you have completed?

- ☐ 8 grade or less
- ☐ some high school
- ☐ high school graduate
- ☐ some college
- ☐ A.A. or A.S.
- ☐ B.A. or B.S.
- ☐ M.A. or M.S.
- ☐ Ph. D.
- ☐ Professional Degree

26. What is your annual income?

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 0 - 5,000       | <input type="checkbox"/> 50,001 - 55,000  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 5,001 - 10,000  | <input type="checkbox"/> 55,001 - 60,000  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 10,001 - 15,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> 60,001 - 65,000  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 15,001 - 20,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> 65,001 - 70,000  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 20,001 - 25,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> 70,001 - 75,000  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 25,001 - 30,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> 75,001 - 80,000  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 30,001 - 35,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> 80,001 - 85,000  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 35,001 - 40,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> 85,001 - 90,000  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 40,001 - 45,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> 90,001 - 95,000  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 45,001 - 50,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> 95,001 - 100,000 |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> Over 100,001     |

27. What is your age?

\_\_\_\_\_

28. What is your occupation?

\_\_\_\_\_

29. What is your race/ethnicity?

\_\_\_\_\_

30. At what age did you move out of your parents' home?

\_\_\_\_\_

NOW WE WOULD LIKE TO KNOW ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN YOU AND YOUR PARTNER. PLEASE CHECK THE ONE ANSWER THAT BEST DESCRIBES YOUR RELATIONSHIP.

31. I do most of the cleaning and scrubbing chores in the house.
- ☐ Always
  - ☐ Most of the time
  - ☐ Equally shared
  - ☐ Hardly ever
  - ☐ Never
32. My partner and I divide the household tasks.
- ☐ Always
  - ☐ Most of the time
  - ☐ Hardly ever
  - ☐ Never
33. My partner does her share of the housework.
- ☐ Always
  - ☐ Most of the time
  - ☐ Hardly ever
  - ☐ Never
34. My partner's contribution to the housework is more important than mine.
- ☐ Strongly agree
  - ☐ Agree
  - ☐ Disagree
  - ☐ Strongly disagree
35. My partner goes out socially with her friends without me.
- ☐ Always
  - ☐ Most of the time
  - ☐ Hardly ever
  - ☐ Never

36. I feel that I must seek my partner's approval before making plans that do not include her.

☐ Always  
☐ Most of the time  
☐ Hardly ever  
☐ Never

37. I lie to my partner.

☐ Always  
☐ Most of the time  
☐ Hardly ever  
☐ Never

38. My partner lies to me.

☐ Always  
☐ Most of the time  
☐ Hardly ever  
☐ Never

39. I do the cooking in our household.

☐ Always  
☐ Most of the time  
☐ Equally shared  
☐ Hardly ever  
☐ Never

40. I do the meal planning in our household.

☐ Always  
☐ Most of the time  
☐ Equally shared  
☐ Hardly ever  
☐ Never

41. I do the yardwork at our home.

☐ Always  
☐ Most of the time  
☐ Equally shared  
☐ Hardly ever  
☐ Never



42. I feel that I am in control of the events that occur in our relationship.
- ☐ Always
  - ☐ Most of the time
  - ☐ Hardly ever
  - ☐ Never
43. I do the grocery shopping for us.
- ☐ Always
  - ☐ Most of the time
  - ☐ Equally shared
  - ☐ Hardly ever
  - ☐ Never
44. I am jealous of my partner's interests outside of our relationship.
- ☐ Always
  - ☐ Most of the time
  - ☐ Hardly ever
  - ☐ Never
45. My partner is jealous of my time spent in interests outside of our relationship.
- ☐ Always
  - ☐ Most of the time
  - ☐ Hardly ever
  - ☐ Never
46. I apologize first after my partner and I have had a disagreement.
- ☐ Always
  - ☐ Most of the time
  - ☐ Hardly ever
  - ☐ Never
47. If my partner had to relocate because of her job, I would
- ☐ Move with her
  - ☐ Probably move with her
  - ☐ Probably not move with her
  - ☐ Not move with her

48. If I had to relocate because of my job, my partner would

- ☐ Move with me
- ☐ Probably move with me
- ☐ Probably not move with me
- ☐ Not move with me

49. The people with whom we most often associate are

- ☐ All my partner's friends
- ☐ Mostly my partner's friends
- ☐ An equal number of both of our friends
- ☐ Mostly my friends
- ☐ All my friends

50. I have to hide my feelings from my partner.

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Most of the time
- ☐ Hardly ever
- ☐ Never

51. My partner makes me feel very important.

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Most of the time
- ☐ Hardly ever
- ☐ Never

52. My partner recognizes my personal accomplishments

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Most of the time
- ☐ Hardly ever
- ☐ Never

53. My partner recognizes my professional accomplishments.

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Most of the time
- ☐ Hardly ever
- ☐ Never

54. I can discuss anything with my partner.
- ☐ Strongly agree
  - ☐ Agree
  - ☐ Disagree
  - ☐ Strongly disagree
55. There are some things about my past that I have not told my partner.
- ☐ Strongly agree
  - ☐ Agree
  - ☐ Disagree
  - ☐ Strongly disagree
56. I sometimes intentionally try to take my partner "down a peg or two".
- ☐ Strongly agree
  - ☐ Agree
  - ☐ Disagree
  - ☐ Strongly disagree
57. I am able to tell my partner that I dislike someone that she truly cares for.
- ☐ Strongly agree
  - ☐ Agree
  - ☐ Disagree
  - ☐ Strongly disagree
58. I am more intelligent than my partner.
- ☐ Strongly agree
  - ☐ Agree
  - ☐ Disagree
  - ☐ Strongly disagree
59. I met my partner at
- ☐ Church
  - ☐ Bar
  - ☐ Introduced by mutual friends
  - ☐ Dating service
  - ☐ Political or professional function
  - ☐ Other: Please specify \_\_\_\_\_

60. How long did you and your partner date before you moved in together?

- ☐ Less than 1 month
- ☐ Between 1 month and 6 months
- ☐ Between 6 months and 1 year
- ☐ Between 1 year and 3 years
- ☐ 3 years or more

61. How often do you go to gay/lesbian bars with your partner?

\_\_\_\_\_

62. How often do you go to gay/lesbian bars without your partner?

63. I love my partner more than she loves me.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

64. I intend to remain with my partner for the rest of my life.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

65. We had our relationship blessed in a Holy Union because

- ☐ My partner wanted to, so I agreed
- ☐ I wanted to, so my partner agreed
- ☐ We both wanted a Holy Union equally
- ☐ Our friends were going through Holy Unions, so we thought we should
- ☐ Our relationship has not been blessed in a Holy Union

66. My partner loves me more than I love her.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

67. Are there any children presently living with you and your partner?
- ( ) Yes \*\*If yes, please answer #68 through 71
- ( ) No \*\*If no, please go to #72.
68. How many children reside with you and your partner?
- Girls \_\_\_\_\_ Boys \_\_\_\_\_
69. Of the children living with you and your partner, how many were brought into the relationship as a result of a prior heterosexual relationship that either of you had?
- \_\_\_\_\_
70. Of the children living with you and your partner, how many were the result of a mutual decision by you and your partner to have your own child/children?
- \_\_\_\_\_
71. If any of the children living with you and your partner were a result of a conscious, mutual decision between you to have and raise your own child/children, by what method were those children conceived and/or brought into the relationship?
- ( ) In vitro
- ( ) Artificial insemination
- ( ) A voluntary heterosexual union
- ( ) Adoption
- ( ) Other: Please specify \_\_\_\_\_

THE NEXT FEW QUESTIONS DEAL WITH HOW YOU AND YOUR PARTNER HANDLE FINANCES. PLEASE CHECK THE ONE ANSWER THAT YOU THINK BEST DESCRIBES YOUR SITUATION.

72. How is your rent/mortgage paid?
- ( ) I pay all
- ( ) I pay most
- ( ) Equally shared
- ( ) Partner pays most
- ( ) Partner pays all

73. How are your utilities paid?

- ☐ I pay all
- ☐ I pay most
- ☐ Equally shared
- ☐ Partner pays most
- ☐ Partner pays all

74. Who pays for the groceries?

- ☐ I pay all
- ☐ I pay most
- ☐ Equally shared
- ☐ Partner pays most
- ☐ Partner pays all

75. Who pays for entertainment outside the home (like dinner at a restaurant)?

- ☐ I pay all
- ☐ I pay most
- ☐ Equally shared
- ☐ Partner pays most
- ☐ Partner pays all

76. Do you have a joint checking account?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

77. Who controls the checkbook?

- ☐ I always control the checkbook
- ☐ I usually control the checkbook
- ☐ We share the checkbook equally
- ☐ My partner usually controls the checkbook
- ☐ My partner always controls the checkbook

78. Do you have a joint savings account?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

79. Do you have any joint investments where both names appear on the papers of ownership?

☐ Yes  
☐ No

NOW WE WOULD LIKE TO ASK YOU SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT THE "NUTS AND BOLTS" OF YOUR RELATIONSHIP. WE KNOW THAT SOME OF THESE QUESTIONS ARE TOUGH AND THAT SOME OF THEM MAY NOT APPLY TO YOUR RELATIONSHIP, BUT WE ASK THAT YOU CONSIDER EACH OF THEM CAREFULLY. IF ANY OF THE QUESTIONS DO APPLY TO YOU, PLEASE REMEMBER THAT NO ONE WILL BE ABLE TO CONNECT YOU WITH YOUR ANSWER.

80. Even when I know that something is not my fault, in order to keep from arguing I say that it is my fault.

☐ Always  
☐ Most of the time  
☐ Hardly ever  
☐ Never

81. My partner threatens to leave me if I do not change something about my behavior.

☐ Always  
☐ Most of the time  
☐ Hardly ever  
☐ Never

82. In reference to your partner, do you think to yourself "she will change"?

☐ Always  
☐ Most of the time  
☐ Hardly ever  
☐ Never

83. Do you hesitate to discuss matters that are important to you with your partner?

☐ Yes  
☐ No

If yes, please tell us why \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

84. When your partner lies to you, does she make you feel that it was your fault that she lied?
- ☐ Always
  - ☐ Most of the time
  - ☐ Hardly ever
  - ☐ Never
85. Is your partner quick to anger?
- ☐ Always
  - ☐ Most of the time
  - ☐ Hardly ever
  - ☐ Never
86. I am the first one who wants to discuss a problem that arises between me and my partner.
- ☐ Always
  - ☐ Most of the time
  - ☐ Hardly ever
  - ☐ Never
87. I can usually get my way when we argue.
- ☐ Always
  - ☐ Most of the time
  - ☐ Hardly ever
  - ☐ Never
88. There are times that my partner's reactions frighten me.
- ☐ Strongly agree
  - ☐ Agree
  - ☐ Disagree
  - ☐ Strongly disagree
89. I am able to tell my partner that I dislike someone that she cares about.
- ☐ Strongly agree
  - ☐ Agree
  - ☐ Disagree
  - ☐ Strongly disagree



90. Sometimes my partner acts as though she is afraid of me.
- ☐ Strongly agree
  - ☐ Agree
  - ☐ Disagree
  - ☐ Strongly disagree
91. I believe that slapping my partner with an open hand occasionally is all right.
- ☐ Strongly agree
  - ☐ Agree
  - ☐ Disagree
  - ☐ Strongly disagree
92. I believe that a shoving match between my partner and me helps clear the air during and/or after an argument.
- ☐ Strongly agree
  - ☐ Agree
  - ☐ Disagree
  - ☐ Strongly disagree
93. When my partner and I argue, we scream at each other.
- ☐ Strongly agree
  - ☐ Agree
  - ☐ Disagree
  - ☐ Strongly disagree
94. When my partner and I disagree about something, I am usually right.
- ☐ Strongly agree
  - ☐ Agree
  - ☐ Disagree
  - ☐ Strongly disagree
95. When my partner and I disagree about something, I end up getting my way.
- ☐ Strongly agree
  - ☐ Agree
  - ☐ Disagree
  - ☐ Strongly disagree

96. When my partner and I disagree about something, she is usually right
- ☐ Strongly agree
  - ☐ Agree
  - ☐ Disagree
  - ☐ Strongly disagree
97. My partner makes me angry very often
- ☐ Strongly agree
  - ☐ Agree
  - ☐ Disagree
  - ☐ Strongly disagree
98. When my partner makes me angry, to keep the peace I keep these feelings of anger bottled up.
- ☐ Strongly agree
  - ☐ Agree
  - ☐ Disagree
  - ☐ Strongly disagree
99. My partner is more verbally abusive toward me when she
- ☐ Has been drinking
  - ☐ Has been doing drugs
  - ☐ Is suffering from PMS
  - ☐ Other: Please specify \_\_\_\_\_
  - ☐ My partner is never verbally abusive toward me
100. My partner is more physically abusive toward me when she
- ☐ Has been drinking
  - ☐ Has been doing drugs
  - ☐ Is suffering from PMS
  - ☐ Other: Please specify \_\_\_\_\_
  - ☐ She is never physically abusive toward me
101. During the past year, the police have been called because of my partner's physical abuse of me.
- ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No

If yes, how many times? \_\_\_\_\_

102. Within the past year, I have received medical attention as a result of injuries sustained by my partner's physical abuse

☐ Yes  
☐ No

If yes, how many times? \_\_\_\_\_

103. Within the past year, I have lied to others about the cause of bruises that I received from the physical abuse of my partner.

☐ Yes                      If yes, how many times? \_\_\_\_  
☐ No

104. When my partner hits me, I deserve it

☐ Always  
☐ Most of the time  
☐ Hardly ever  
☐ Never

105. My partner is very sorry after she physically abuses me.

☐ Always  
☐ Most of the time  
☐ Hardly ever  
☐ Never

106. After she physically abuses me, my partner promises that she will never do it again.

☐ Always  
☐ Most of the time  
☐ Hardly ever  
☐ Never

107. When my partner promises that she will never hit me again, I believe her.

☐ Always  
☐ Most of the time  
☐ Hardly ever  
☐ Never

108. PLEASE THINK BACK OVER THE LAST YEAR DURING AN ARGUMENT OR DISAGREEMENT WITH YOUR PARTNER. IF YOU HAVE DONE ANY OF THE FOLLOWING ITEMS ON THE LIST BELOW, PLEASE USE THE ANSWER KEY AND RESPOND ACCORDINGLY.

- 0 = Never
- 1 = Once that year
- 2 = Two or three times that year
- 3 = Often, but less than once a month
- 4 = About once a month
- 5 = More than once a month

A.	I tried to discuss the issue relatively calmly	0 1 2 3 4 5
B.	Did discuss the issue relatively calmly	0 1 2 3 4 5
C.	Got information to back up my side of things	0 1 2 3 4 5
D.	Brought in someone else to help settle things	0 1 2 3 4 5
E.	Argued heatedly and yelled at my partner	0 1 2 3 4 5
F.	Insulted my partner	0 1 2 3 4 5
G.	Sulked and/or refused to talk about it	0 1 2 3 4 5
H.	Stomped out of the room	0 1 2 3 4 5
I.	Threw something (but not at my partner)	0 1 2 3 4 5
J.	Threatened to hit or throw something at my partner	0 1 2 3 4 5
K.	Threw something at my partner	0 1 2 3 4 5
L.	Pushed, grabbed, or shoved my partner	0 1 2 3 4 5
M.	Hit (or tried to hit) my partner with my hands	0 1 2 3 4 5
N.	Hit (or tried to hit) my partner with something other than my hands	0 1 2 3 4 5

109. WE ARE GOING TO USE THE SAME LIST AND THE SAME ANSWER KEY, BUT THIS TIME WE WOULD LIKE FOR YOU TO TELL US HOW MANY TIMES YOUR PARTNER DID ANY OF THESE THINGS TO YOU DURING AN ARGUMENT OR DISAGREEMENT IN THE PAST YEAR.

0 = Never

1 = Once that year

2 = Two or three times that year

3 = Often, but less than once a month

4 = About once a month

5 = More than once a month

A.	She tried to discuss the issue relatively calmly	0 1 2 3 4 5
B.	She did discuss the issue relatively calmly	0 1 2 3 4 5
C.	Got information to back up her side of things	0 1 2 3 4 5
D.	Brought in someone else to help settle things	0 1 2 3 4 5
E.	Argued heatedly and yelled at me	0 1 2 3 4 5
F.	Insulted me	0 1 2 3 4 5
G.	Sulked and/or refused to talk about it	0 1 2 3 4 5
H.	Stomped out of the room	0 1 2 3 4 5
I.	Threw something (but not at me)	0 1 2 3 4 5
J.	Threatened to hit me or to throw something at me	0 1 2 3 4 5
K.	Threw something at me	0 1 2 3 4 5
L.	Pushed, grabbed, or shoved me	0 1 2 3 4 5
M.	Hit ( or tried to hit) me with her hands	0 1 2 3 4 5
N.	Hit ( or tried to hit) me something other than her hands	0 1 2 3 4 5

## NOW IT IS YOUR TURN TO TELL US HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT THINGS!!

- 110. Please tell us the most positive aspects of the relationship that you have with your partner.
- 111. What do you consider to be the most positive aspect of being a lesbian.
- 112. What has been the most difficult problem with your partner that you have had to overcome?
- 113. What frustrates you the most about your partner?
- 114. What are the most negative aspects of being a lesbian?
- 115. My partner cannot control her physically abusive tendencies toward me because
- 116. My partner does physically abuse me. The reason that I do not end the relationship is
- 117. The one thing that I would change about my partner if I could is
- 118. If I could speak before the United States Congress, I would explain to the members what it is like to be a lesbian in America. I would say

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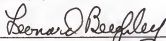
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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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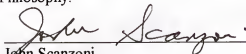


I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



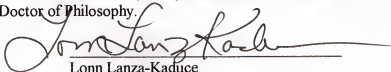
Leonard Beeghley, Chairman  
Professor of Sociology

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



John Scanzoni  
Professor of Sociology

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



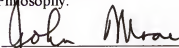
Lonn Lanza-Kaduce  
Associate Professor of Sociology

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



Anthony LaGeca  
Professor of Sociology

I certify that I have read this study and that in my opinion it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.



John Moore  
Professor of Anthropology

This dissertation was submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Department of Sociology in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and to the Graduate School and was accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

May 1998

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Dean, Graduate School